

Community, School and Sport: Experiences of Male Youth from Rexdale

Daniel E. O. Girdler, O.C.T., B.Ph.Ed. (Hnrs), B.Ed.

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Supervisor: Dr. Cathy van Ingen

Faculty of Applied Health Sciences

Brock University

St. Catharines, Ontario

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### **Dedication**

For the community of Rexdale and the people who call it home.

### **Abstract**

**Key words: Sport, Racialized, Male, Youth, Rexdale**

This research study used an interview-based methodology to examine the schooling and sport experiences of racialized male youth from Toronto's Rexdale community. Situated in the city's northwest end, this marginal space is home to a highly racialized, economically disadvantaged and inordinately criminalized populace. Although the media continues to essentialize members of the community by propagating a prejudiced, homogenous, predictable, and largely taken-for-granted discourse that constructs the community as 'other', Rexdale exhibits vast diversity and offers its male youth a variety of opportunities and experiences. In discussions with participants it was revealed that the intersections of race, class and gender have substantial impacts on the ways in which Rexdale's male youth experience their community, schools and sport. More specifically, Rexdale's Black male youth regularly exhibit great resistance against oppression within their community and schools. As a result of these experiences their participation in sport can carry heightened significance.

### Acknowledgements

This section is lengthy; maybe unreasonably so. I apologize in advance if this goes against some facet of scholarly etiquette. However, I may not get another chance to thank people in a piece of academic literature. So, right or wrong, I must take full advantage of this unique opportunity.

In general, I would like to thank all friends and family for supporting me throughout this amazing journey. Although the preceding sentence is generic, bordering on cliché it was written with true sincerity. Still, there are certain people for whom one sincere sentence of acknowledgement would be horribly inadequate. These special individuals deserve much, much more than extra attention and an abundance of lauding. I have done my best to explicate the meaning that they have in my life and to articulate the depth of my appreciation.

This degree has been extraordinarily challenging. It has shaped my life in ways I could not have anticipated when I accepted my offer of admission during the final semester of my last year of undergraduate studies back in 2010. I know that without the love and support of my immediate family and the hard work and guidance of my committee members I would not have been able to finish. It is realizations like these that have augmented my curricular and/or academic education. Realizations like these, I now appreciate, are invaluable.

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## Table of Contents

Table of Contents .....	v
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	1
Chapter 2: Review of Literature .....	6
Critical Race Theory .....	6
Inauguration.....	6
What is CRT? .....	7
What is race? .....	9
Theorizing racism.....	11
Blacks in Canada .....	13
Sport .....	15
Benefits of sport participation .....	15
Black youth sport participation in Canada .....	16
Sport as a means of identity construction.....	17
Resistance and upward social mobility .....	19
Perpetuation of racism and subjugation through sport as a part of a system of oppression.....	20
Inequitable Education.....	23
Resistance .....	23
Establishing identity .....	24
Eurocentrism.....	26
Stigma/stereotype .....	28
Futility of education .....	29
Results of educational inequity .....	30
Spatial Segregation.....	31
What is meant by space? .....	31
Who regulates space? .....	31
How is space regulated? .....	32
Symbiosis of ghetto and prison .....	34
The existence of spatial segregation in Toronto.....	36
Racialized Criminalization .....	36
Blacks as immigrants/unauthentic Canadians/'Other' .....	36
Media.....	38
Colourblindness within the criminal justice system.....	39
Racial prejudice throughout the criminal justice system.....	40
Understanding criminalization .....	42
Chapter 3: Methodology .....	44
The Development of My Research Project .....	45
Data Collection.....	46
Sampling.....	46
Recruitment .....	47

Participants .....	49
Methods .....	52
Data Analysis .....	54
Ethical Considerations.....	54
Trustworthiness .....	55
Researcher Reflexivity .....	58
Chapter 4: Life in Rexdale for Racialized Male Youth .....	63
Racism 2.0 .....	63
The Community of Rexdale .....	75
Policing in Rexdale .....	82
Chapter 5: School and Sport .....	97
Education in Rexdale.....	97
Sport in Rexdale .....	110
Chapter 6: Conclusion.....	125
Future directions .....	132
References .....	135
Appendix A.....	143
Appendix B .....	145

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

On July 16<sup>th</sup>, 2012 a chain of shootings on Danzig Street in Toronto's east end left two people dead and 23 injured. Toronto's Chief of Police Bill Blair described the Scarborough shootings as "unprecedented" and as "the worst incident of gun violence" in North America during the course of his 35-year career (McDiarmid, Slaughter, Bosanac, Yang & Casey, 2012; "Toronto shooting spree," 2012). The neighbourhood in which the shootings occurred was described as "a mixed neighbourhood of brick high-rises, townhouses and single-family homes" (Casey, McDiarmid, Yang & Slaughter, 2012). The block party at which the shootings occurred was described as featuring "Caribbean barbecue" and "jerk chicken" (Casey et al., 2012). Just days after the shootings speculation of gang involvement began despite the fact that suspects had yet to be apprehended (Donkin, Poisson, Alamenciak & Rider, 2012). Building on that suspicion, it was assumed that retaliation would follow (Donkin, et al., 2012). Although no charges had been made in relation to the shootings, Toronto Mayor Rob Ford met with Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty to talk about increasing funding for the Toronto Anti-Violence Intervention Strategy (TAVIS) (Dale, 2012). TAVIS involves an increase in police surveillance in "high crime neighbourhoods". It authorizes police to stop and question residents while even going so far as to permit the creation of profiles on certain individuals (Dale, 2012).

Four days later on July 20<sup>th</sup>, 2012 a gunman entered a movie theatre in Aurora, Colorado and opened fire on the audience; killing twelve and injuring fifty eight. The suspect – 24 year-old James Holmes – was apprehended beside his car which was parked near the theatre (Horwitz & Turque 2012). At the time of the arrest Holmes was



reportedly “wearing a “ballistic helmet,” a bulletproof vest, leggings, a throat protector, a groin protector, a gas mask and protective gloves” (Horwitz & Turque, 2012). In the days following the shootings it was stressed that Holmes was a suspect in the case. The fact that Holmes was a graduate student in the neuroscience program at the University of Colorado was also made very clear (Horwitz & Turque, 2012). Furthermore, the fact that Holmes had spent time in psychiatric care prior to his alleged shooting rampage was emphasized (“Colorado shooting,” 2012).

Although explicit references to social identities were absent from the discourses on the shootings, the intersecting components of social identities become seminal when the discourses are contrasted. First, it is assumed that criminal behaviour is a male behaviour. Next, in mentioning that the Danzig Street barbecue featured Caribbean foods and occurred in a neighbourhood depicted as low-income, the reader is lead to believe that the victims and, more importantly, the perpetrators of the Scarborough shootings are Black and of low socio-economic status. Once it has been determined that the perpetrators are poor, Black males then gang involvement can be safely assumed because poor Black males are “gangstas” according to the collective social imagination. It is within this context that an increase in oppressive police surveillance in low income, racialized neighbourhoods around the city does not seem to be an incredibly prejudiced infringement on human rights but a reasonable and justified attempt to ensure the safety of the people of Toronto.

Conversely, when an overwhelming amount of evidence indicates that a White male was the only person responsible for the movie theatre shooting in Aurora, Colorado the implication is met with a collective social disbelief. Despite the horrific nature of the

crime he most certainly committed Holmes' human rights were respected as every effort was made to ensure he was treated fairly by the criminal justice system. When the evidence accumulated was too damning Holmes' behaviour was attributed to mental illness. Yet, exonerating Holmes of responsibility does not suffice. Holmes' academic brilliance was accentuated ad nauseam. Just like that social order is restored.

Was it by coincidence that the discourses were constructed in this way? Are the aforementioned excerpts simply indicative of the *Toronto Star's* prejudice? Are the articles on the shootings indicative of Canadian media's prejudice in general? No. These two stories are indicative of a Canadian society that employs a racist system of oppression similar to American society and other Eurocentric societies around the world. In this system not just criminality but poverty and low levels of intelligence are also linked with Blackness. In this paradigm Whites subjugate all racialized people in an effort to maintain power conferred upon them.

It is this very system of racialized oppression that piques my interest as an educator and as a researcher. Growing up in a racially diverse area of Toronto it started to become apparent to me during high school that power was not equally distributed within my community. I began to realize that I not only assumed certain privileges because of my Whiteness but also as a function of being male, heterosexual and able of body and mind. I became fascinated by social inequity and determined that I wanted to use the advantages afforded me by society to help solve or, at very least, address its existence.

In working towards my goal of becoming a teacher by completing my degree in education I could not help but notice the relevance of race and the unequal distribution of

power within Ontario's educational system. As I began working on my Master's degree I was hopeful that what I would learn and the research that I would produce could be used to help eliminate educational injustices and create improvements within Ontario's educational system and others. In reflecting upon the process of completing my Master's degree I can say that what I have learned has indeed changed my life. It has made me a better citizen and I now feel that I have the tools to help reduce racial oppression and social inequity. In a professional sense I am certain that what I have learned has made me a better educator and I am confident that I can contribute to a school that strives to exemplify equitable education. I am hopeful that this thesis will inspire similar transformation in others.

The purpose of my research was to use an interview-based methodology to examine the role of race in the schooling and sport experiences of racialized male youth from Toronto's Rexdale community. The following three research questions guided my inquiry:

1. How do racialized male youth from Rexdale experience their community?
2. What is the role of school in the lives of racialized youth from Rexdale?
3. In what ways do race, class and gender intersect to shape the sporting experiences of male youth from Rexdale?

The following chapter is a literature review that is predicated on Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT provides the theoretical framework that I used to analyze data I gathered and to situate my research within the existing body of literature on race, school, and sport. The literature review is succeeded by a methodology chapter that examines the development of my research project, the data collection strategy used, how I analyzed the

data, ethical considerations and reflections on the research itself as well as the role I played and how I might be implicated in this research. Next are the two data analysis chapters, *Life in Rexdale for Racialized Male Youth* and *School and Sport*, in which interview data and observations are analyzed and contextualized with the relevant literature. Lastly, the findings are summarized in the final chapter. It is within the conclusion that I re-visit my research questions and discuss possible future research directions.

## **Chapter 2: Review of Literature**

### **Critical Race Theory**

#### *Inauguration*

Critical Race Theory (CRT) was established in the 1970s to address what American legal scholars and civil rights activists perceived was a loss in the momentum gained from the American civil rights movement of the 1960s (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). CRT was created from Critical Legal Studies (CLS) by Black legal scholar Derrick Bell and White legal scholar Alan Freeman with the influence of civil rights activists Dr. Martin Luther King, Malcolm X and W.E.B. Du Bois (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). Dedicated in their fight for social equity they feared stagnation and rightfully so. At the time attempts to achieve social justice were nearly entirely constricted to the domain of law (Alexander, 2012). Moreover, the political process of choosing the right person with whom to seek legal precedence further limited not only the ways in which social justice could be achieved but also on whose behalf it could be sought (Alexander, 2012). The chosen individual had to exhibit exceptional character and possess a flawless reputation for there to be any chance of achieving a victory for civil rights (Alexander, 2012).

If it was to survive as an effective means of achieving social justice, CRT would be forced to adapt almost immediately after its founding. This adaptation was made necessary because a new system of social oppression was beginning to replace the old one (Alexander, 2012). The force of the civil rights movement had created serious concerns about the structural stability of America's capitalist social hierarchy especially for the White American males perched atop it. The recently defunct Jim Crow laws

could no longer serve as a system of racial oppression (Alexander, 2012). If the powerful wished to keep the power and privilege they historically enjoyed then a newer, less explicit system of racial oppression needed to be enacted and promptly. The development of a new system became a priority when the White American male bourgeoisie began to foresee the collapse of the old system (Alexander, 2012). The mandate of this task was to make the replacement process as seamless as possible (Alexander, 2012).

The system of oppression plagues American and Canadian societies to this day and is one predicated on rhetoric with “colourblindness” at its nucleus (Alexander, 2012). In this era of colourblindness, it is non-explicit racism that serves as the main tool in maintaining social oppression (Wise, 2009). As will be demonstrated, inequitable education, spatial segregation and racialized criminalization are integral to the maintenance of this system of racialized oppression.

While CLS remains foundational to CRT, the theoretical framework has begun to acknowledge the intersection of individual social identity as well as new areas in which race and racism are germane. This is an acknowledgement of the following facts: social systems of oppression act on individuals differently, definition(s) of race are constantly changing and, racism is ubiquitous in contemporary society, however ostensibly discrete (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Hylton, 2010).

#### *What is CRT?*

Critical race theorists view the world as “fundamentally racist” (Hylton, 2010, p. 336). The social pyramid is structured in such a way that White is preferred over ‘other’, male over female, upper class over lower class, heterosexual over non-heterosexual and

able-bodied and minded over physically and/or mentally disabled. The more social and cultural capital – which includes variables such as attitudes, preferences and behaviour – the higher one's position on the social pyramid (Hage, 2000; James, 2005). Therefore, those in power lead in a way that is self-serving and which “reproduces the social conditions which allow for the perpetuation of racism, sexism, poverty, hunger, and material deprivation” (Dei, Mazzuca, McIsaac & Zine, 1997, p. 195). CRT scholars set out to debunk the myth of meritocracy and expose society for what it really is by creating a counter-reality to contrast the hegemonic one propagated by those in power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2002; James, 2012b).

In accounting for the intersections of social identity (race, sex, class, etc.), CRT scholars have made a concerted effort to challenge essentialism in analyses of racial identity construction, racism and racial inequality (Hylton, 2010). Thus, the CRT framework recognizes and attempts to accurately depict diversity of individual identity and experience so as to attempt to achieve social justice for all oppressed individuals.

The United States and Canada are undoubtedly Eurocentric societies as could be understood by their histories as European colonies. As critical sport theorist, Ben Carrington (1998) explains

Eurocentrism is used conceptually to refer to those discourses and relations of power that privilege culturally hegemonic European notions of Western universality and that therefore elide, within its frame of reference, the voices of others, both within and outside the West. In another sense, Eurocentrism can be understood as an attempt to recenter the West in conditions when its universality can no longer be guaranteed due to the

multifaceted interrogations of the West by various postcolonial movements and critical multiculturalisms (p. 292).

It is argued that racism, sexism, classism, homophobia and ableism are not the result of hateful or evil individuals but are instead products of a society which seeks to maintain its current stratified and hierarchical power structure (Alexander, 2012; Nunn, 1997).

The process of subordinating minorities and imposing a caste-like system reinforces the essentialist illusion of clearly bounded, easily characterized racialized categories (Gosine, 2008; Hall, 1997; Hylton, 2010). “The changing nature of attitudes to racialized behaviour, the social construction of racism and even the terminology of ‘race’,” argues Hylton (2010), “are constantly changing, contested and reconstituted, thus making the anti-racism acts of criminal activist scholars and their abstract conceptualizations ‘works in progress’” (p. 336). Therefore, the theoretical framework established here will likely only be useful in analyzing this phenomenon right now and may not be useful in examining the same phenomenon in years to come. The phenomenon itself will change as well.

*What is race?*

Race, as is clearly articulated by Ian F. Haney López (1994) is “a biological illusion, but a very real part of society” (p. 172). López (1994) describes race “as a vast group of people loosely bound together by historically contingent, socially significant elements of their morphology and/or ancestry” (p. 165). Hall (1997) describes the historical context within which Blackness and racial difference were formed in the Western world:



The first began with the sixteenth century contact between European traders and the West African kingdoms, which provided a source of black slaves for three centuries. Its effects were to be found in slavery and in the post-slave societies of the New World. The second was the European colonization of Africa and the ‘scramble’ between the European powers for the control of colonial territory, markets and raw materials in the period of ‘high Imperialism’. The third was the post-World War II migrations from the ‘Third World’ into Europe and North America (p. 239).

Placing a specific focus on the experiences of Black male youth in sport is not done with the intention of trivializing the experiences of oppression experienced by other groups of people from other social locations. Rather, this review of literature was written in an effort to provide a viable framework with which to understand a particular demographic within Canada’s population that continues to experience racially-based marginalization (Spence, 2003). Some of the theory used will focus on racialized people in general while some will focus specifically on Canadian Black male youth. It is argued that it is in fact difference which enables meaning to be produced (Hall, 1997). “We know what black means,” suggests Hall (1997), citing Saussure, “not because there is some essence of ‘blackness’ but because we can contrast it with its opposite – white” (p. 234). Yet as Black male youth are examined, occasionally in comparison to Whites it is important to acknowledge that this theoretical framework has not been built with the intention of establishing a Black/White binary which can be problematic (Perea, 1997).

*Theorizing racism*

Wise (2009) understands racism to have two constituent meanings. First, an ideological belief that one racial group is superior and that the other racial group is inferior. Second, he argues that racism is in itself an actual system of inequity predicated on the establishment of racial difference and, subsequently, races. Caldwell (1991) elaborates on this notion, stating that racism works in conjunction with other forms of discrimination such as sexism, classism and homophobia. Therefore it is important that every part of an individual's social identity is considered so as to attempt to truly understand the discrimination and oppression that an individual is subjected to. According to Caldwell (1991) the interlocking venues of oppression result in subjugation within social, political and economic contexts. Finally, French sociologist Pierre-André Taguieff encapsulates the ubiquity of racism in his list of some of its forms: "attitude, ideology, prejudice, xenophobia, naturalization, biological, ethnic, essentialist, assimilationist, competitive, auto-referential, altero-referential, differential and inegalitarian" (Hage, 2000, p. 29). The wide range of ways in which racism may be perpetrated provides an indication of the ways in which individuals may be discriminated against and, as a result, oppressed.

Hage (2000) states that White racists who wish to live in exclusively White nations share commonalities with White multiculturalists who "tolerate" racialized others. He writes that both parties share nationalist visions and understand themselves as central to their society. "The Australian and Canadian experience suggests that prejudice co-exists with tolerance, as does racism with social harmony and multiculturalism with ethnic inequality" (Hage, 2000, p. 84).

Wise (2009) argues, however, that a new form of racism permeates American society. “Racism 2.0” is a newer, more subtle type of racism in which a finite number of racialized people are permitted to achieve success within a society that remains Eurocentric to the core (Wise, 2009). In a society characterized by this form of racism the success of certain racialized people is used as proof that the society is a true meritocracy (Alexander, 2012; Wise, 2009). The rest of the racialized population that does not thrive because of social oppression serve as evidence that racialized people in general are inferior to Whites (Alexander, 2012; Wise, 2009).

Still, the racialized people who are permitted to succeed are only permitted to succeed on the condition that they continue to support White power. Racialized people may even support successful racialized people knowing full well that those same empowered people are enabling the oppression of their racial group but feel relieved that there is another racialized person in a position of relative power (Alexander, 2012).

This is the same society in which colourblindness prevails (Alexander, 2012). In this system it is not problematic that White people are conferred privilege while Black people are subjugated. This is because in the newest system of racialized oppression, individuals do not have a race and have obtained their respective positions in society as a direct result of their own effort and nothing else. As Alexander (2012) argues:

We have become blind, not so much to race, but to the existence of racial caste in America. More than forty-five years ago, Martin Luther King Jr. warned of this danger. He insisted that blindness and indifference to racial groups is actually more important than racial hostility to the creation and maintenance of racialized systems of control (p.241).

The Racism 2.0/colourblind society comes complete with a language in which race never has to be referred to explicitly. Words such as ‘crime’, ‘gangster’ and ‘inner city’ are among a list of terms which are heavily inundated with racial meaning (Alexander, 2012). They are evidence of a society in which race is supremely important and relevant but is simultaneously banished from social discourse.

### *Blacks in Canada*

Before examining CRT more thoroughly it is very important to acknowledge the caution with which CRT will be used as a theoretical framework to analyze data obtained in a Canadian context. The United States “has a different history of social relations” than Canada and so it is with trepidation and extreme selectivity that a theoretical framework derived in significant part from American scholarly literature is constructed (Novac, Darden, Hulchanski & Seguin, 2002, p. 1).

However, while undoubtedly different there are socio-historical as well as contemporary cultural parallels between the two countries which warrant the use of American literature in this research. For instance, Blacks were exploited as slaves in Canada from the seventeenth century until the beginning of the nineteenth century (Henry & Tator, 2009; Mensah, 2010). The fact that “many Canadian Blacks chose to return to the United States” after the Emancipation Proclamation was passed provides an indication as to what life was like for Blacks who lived in Canada in the period of time from 1600s until Confederation (Henry & Tator, 2009, p. 59). Reitz and Breton (1998, as cited in Mensah, 2010) argue that today’s “Canadians and Americans are roughly similar in their attitudes and behaviours toward racial minorities” (p. 2). Furthermore, in regards

to racism Canadian sociologist Vic Satzewich (1998 as cited in Mensah, 2010) states that there is no less racism in Canada than in the United States.

So, with a relative dearth of Canadian literature on the systemic oppression of Black male youth in Canada the inclusion of American literature is both justified and important. Former Toronto District School Board Director of Education, Chris Spence<sup>1</sup>, among others (e.g., Dei et al., 1997; James, 2005, 2012b), describes the dire position of Black male youth in Canada's social hierarchy. Spence (2003) argues that Black students rank last in education and that their socio-economic status in Canada is on the decline. He states that Blacks also have higher than average unemployment and homicide rates and are over-represented in the criminal justice system (Spence, 2003).

Research has consistently shown that Blacks tend to be relegated to the bottom rungs of Canada's socioeconomic ladder (see Mensah, 2010; Ornstein, 2006). In comparison with the general Canadian population, a disproportionately high number of Black Canadians live in single-parent families and in low-income households. In addition, empirical evidence has consistently demonstrated that Black Canadians continue to trail other racially-classified groups (with the exception of Native Canadians) in income and employment status even when accounting for other variables that affect the relationship between race and these socioeconomic outcomes, notably educational attainment, academic field of study, occupation, nativity, sex, and age (see Gosine, 2008, p. 311).

Canadian sociologist Michael Ornstein has provided further evidence of the racialized nature of social inequality in Canada. According to the 2001 Canadian census

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<sup>1</sup> While this thesis was being written Chris Spence was charged with plagiarizing his doctoral thesis. As a result of the charges he chose to resign from his position as the Toronto District School Board's Director of Education.

males from the European ethno-racial group between the ages of 18 and 64 had an unemployment rate of 4% while men of the same demographic from the Caribbean ethno-racial group had an unemployment rate of 6.9% and men from the African ethno-racial group had a rate of 9.6% (Ornstein, 2006). In light of these statistics it is not surprising to see that only 10.6% of people from the European ethno-racial group were living in poverty compared to 22.2% of those from the Caribbean ethno-racial group and 38.5% from the African ethno-racial group (Ornstein, 2006).

### **Sport**

Consistent with its development of new ways in which to challenge society, CRT has been used to examine sport critically since explicit bigotry and implicit or subtle racism occur within sport (Hylton, 2010).

#### *Benefits of sport participation*

The social, physical and mental benefits of sports are well-documented. Participation in sports can lead to increased self-esteem, positive self-image, greater self-discipline and finer time management skills (James, 2005). More specifically, participation in sports can have a profound influence on student-athletes' short and long-term educational goals as well as career aspirations (James, 2005). Sports may also influence the shaping of student-athlete identities as well as provide individuals with incentive to attend school and apply themselves in class. Furthermore, coaches, physical education teachers or even supervisors of sport can provide youth with positive role models to emulate (Wilson & White, 2001).

For many youth, especially racialized male youth, school can be a tedious and alienating experience with little academic success (James, 2005). Extra-curricular sports

can provide these youth with ways of dealing with the feelings of frustration and anger caused by being marginalized during school. Sports can provide these youth with an opportunity to construct positive school experiences, which can enable them to tolerate the myriad negative experiences they can have (James, 2005).

*Black youth sport participation in Canada*

Abdel-Shehid (2005) argues that one cannot examine sport and Black masculinity in Canada today without focusing on “roots” and “routes” (p. 16). According to Abdel-Shehid (2005) Black Canadian males who try to establish Canadian roots are making an attempt to validate themselves as authentic Canadians; a very difficult task in a social context that steadfastly positions them as immigrants and/or unauthentic Canadians (Ali, 2008; Gosine, 2008). Furthermore, efforts made by Black Canadian males to secure Canadian roots can be made more complicated by what James (2005) describes as a certain difficulty in negotiating Caribbean (or African) heritage, Canadian location and aspirations for true Black (American) identity. Abdel-Shehid (2005) uses the term routes as a euphemism for social mobility. The use of sports by Black Canadian males to create routes for themselves is significant in a historical context as racial discourse has long determined that Black males do not possess the intelligence to do work that is not labourious (Abdel-Shehid, 2005; James, 2005; Smith, 2006). Sport is one of the only areas in which Black male youth may benefit from a stereotype that positions them as naturally athletic as a result of their ethnic and/or racial background though this may come at the expense of other avenues (James, 2005).

Athletic spaces may also provide a safe haven from the oppressive surveillance and scrutiny Black males are so often subjected to (Wilson & White, 2001). In Wilson

and White's (2001) analysis of a recreation center in southern Ontario it was found that the youth used the centre as a means of escaping negative experiences outside. The youth were of low socio-economic status and shared experiences of social marginalization (Wilson & White, 2001). Exhibiting their autonomy and agency, the youth constructed the space in a way that endorsed individuality and opposed the oppressive conditions they encountered outside (Wilson & White, 2001). Carrington (1998) noted that spaces designated for Blacks to participate in sports can come to symbolize community identity.

Yet, while sports may enhance people's lives in a variety of ways, especially within the framework of an oppressive society, prejudice and racism can often go unnoticed. According to James (2005), notions that sports transcend race and help people to integrate into society or, that individuals, especially those who are marginalized can advance socially through their achievements in sports are unproven and largely ideological.

#### *Sport as a means of identity construction*

It is important to reflect upon history in order to understand the current social context in which Black males must prove their masculinity. White European masculinity has historically been characterized as powerful, controlling, domineering and tough, among other qualities (Carrington, 1998; James, 2005; Wilson & White, 2001). These signifiers of masculinity were and continue to be the very same qualities that Black men have been denied at the hands of White males (Carrington, 1998; Hall, 1997). So, the practicing and performance of these signifiers has been a way for Black males to assert their masculinity and resist their subjugation (Hall, 1997). Sport can be an excellent means for display of heterosexual masculinities; not only in the performance of sport



itself but also on the body molded by physical exertion during sport (Atencio & Wright, 2008; Carrington, 1998; Wilson & White, 2001).

Nevertheless, not just any sport can be used as a tool by males to establish masculinity. The options available to Black male youth to display their masculinity through sport are further limited by racist discourses which position Black males as unfit for certain sports (James, 2005). Some Black males succumb to the racist discourses by identifying certain sports as 'White sports;' thereby deterring their Black peers from participating in those sports (James, 2005). Accusations of 'acting White' are not only made within the context of sport but in academic contexts as well (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). This phenomenon will be elaborated on further in the 'Inequitable Education' section of this chapter. Sex and/or sexuality may be challenged by peers who deem certain sports unfit for "real" men (Wilson & White, 2001).

Gosine (2008) argues that Black Canadians are thought to be "perpetual immigrants" or unauthentic Canadians (p. 314). Having been denied an authentic Canadian identity, Black Canadians may construct their identities according to types of Blackness external to Canada.

The black United States, by virtue of processes of commodification is often seen as the "home" of blackness in the world, rather than simply as one place in a diaspora. It is worth noting that in addition to being related to forms of commodification, the dominance of American versions of blackness is also related to the overall Americanization of global culture (Abdel-Shehid, 2005, p. 35).

In the United States the sport of basketball is extremely popular, especially among African-Americans (Atencio & Wright, 2008). James (2005) claims that attempting to obtain a basketball scholarship to an American school has become part of the “social world” and “group culture” of Black, male student-athletes.

Hall (1997) argues that recently many American Black male youth have come to embrace their stigma as “gangstas” with violence and crime beginning to signify true Black male identity. He argues that these behaviours are increasingly replacing athletic dominance as markers of true Black masculinity. Hall worries that participation in sports may soon represent something not Black. Canadians may then be at risk of emulating these values. “This follows an understanding of the black masculine “self” as being constituted by the power relations and shifting discourses surrounding athletic black bodies” (Atencio & Wright, 2008, p.265).

#### *Resistance and upward social mobility*

In addition to being a means with which Black male Canadians construct their identity, sports have also been a means of resistance for marginalized groups. Historically, sports were used as a platform on which racial hierarchy was to be affirmed (Carrington, 1998). Victories of Blacks over Whites prompted attempts to prevent inter-racial competition. However, these attempts proved futile so the discourse regarding Black athleticism was forced to change (Carrington, 1998). It is within this historical context that sport is understood as a way in which people can use “power and discourse” to contest racial, gender, colonial, and class methods of subjugation and marginalization (Atencio & Wright, 2008, p. 265; Carrington, 1998).

Furthermore, sport can allow youth to socialize with people they may not have otherwise met, helping to create social networks which may lead to upward social mobility (Wilson & White, 2001). The importance of social networking cannot be understated particularly within an economic context and will be discussed later in greater detail.

Atencio and Wright (2008) found that Black males were actually using their experiences in basketball as leverage to achieve upward social mobility. The athletes used basketball to gain access to social networks that would have likely otherwise proved elusive and to create alternative identities (Atencio & Wright, 2008). In addition, Hall (1997) noted that professional athletes may use the fame and attention afforded to them as a means of engaging in politics in attempts to right social injustices.

*Perpetuation of racism and subjugation through sport as part of a system of oppression*

Sports may ostensibly provide a safe haven from which marginalized individuals can escape oppressive forces within the larger society yet, as Zirin (2005) writes “racism in sports is alive and well” (p. 147). Hylton (2010) states that while explicit racism may be the most obvious, most reported form of racism it is only one form of racism among a plethora within sport; as is the case in society.

James (2005) argues that an athlete’s choice of sport and subsequent success therein has more to do with economic, political, cultural and social conditions that either reinforce or deter the athlete’s choice than the ethno-racial background of the individual that is commonly thought to be the precursor to athletic success. Hylton (2010) adds that coaches often internalize racist stereotypical notions about athletes’ physical and

intellectual strengths and weaknesses. Stereotypes within sport affect not only athletes but considerations for coaching and administrative positions as well (Zirin, 2005).

As Black male youth in Canada are not perceived to be authentic Canadians it is not surprising that they are not understood to possess the qualities necessary to succeed in hockey, one of Canada's national sports (James, 2005, 2012b). Instead they are encouraged to play basketball as it is deemed to be a sport more suited to their strengths and more strongly associated with American Black masculinity (James, 2005). Consequently, although sports may appear at first glance to be a realm in which Black males are welcomed and encouraged to participate this only appears to be true in certain cases.

Professional sports may appear to provide both an escape from oppressive social conditions and the opportunity for expedited social ascension because of lucrative contracts and fame. Yet, upon critical examination, it is evident that Black professional athletes still suffer racial subjugation and intense scrutiny. Abdel-Shehid (2005) argues that Black male athletes are not exempt from a discourse which seeks to criminalize them so they can be subjected to especially high levels of surveillance as a result of their fame. Similarly, Leonard (2010) argues that the NBA "pathologizes and criminalizes" its Black players (p. 253). He claims that the players right to free speech and expression is restricted by fines and that the media portrays Black athletes as "arrogant, entitled, uneducated, and otherwise despicable human beings" (Leonard, 2010, p. 254).

The unrealistic athletic goals and expectations of Black male youth are fostered by a society that convinces these youth that they cannot achieve success through non-athletic means (James, 2005). The problem is conflated by a discourse of social

meritocracy, which teaches youth that hard work and dedication are the only qualities needed to achieve their goals. As basketball is the sport that Blacks are encouraged to play at the expense of academia it is no wonder that well-rounded, healthy identities are often sacrificed for success in the sport along with a plethora of career opportunities.

James (2005) describes this phenomenon in more detail:

On the other hand, there are drawbacks. The self-confidence developed and nurtured through sports sometimes contributes to the formation of an athletic identity that can become so all-consuming that it limits or prevents student athletes from cultivating other social identities and attributes needed to navigate school and societal structures. Participating in sports can also give athletes a sense of over-optimism based on their belief in the merit system, and to this end, they will sometimes sacrifice their bodies and their futures in the name of “winning” (p. 214).

Abdel-Shehid (2005) argues that sport can only be viewed in recognition of a “neo-colonialist and capitalist world-system, such as the one we live in today” (p. 19). With this in mind he states that sport is both labour and art and that as a part of a capitalist system in which racialized workers are alienated, Black athletes are alienated as well. As Abdel-Shehid (2005) explains: ‘Jean-Marie Brohm (1989) referred to sport in capitalism as “mechanization of the body, governed by the principle of maximizing output.” Moreover, Brohm argued that “sport in fact reproduces the world of work”’ (p. 19).

This, James (2005) argued, is something that is demonstrated by Black athletes who win basketball scholarships to American universities. He contends that the athletes

receive a paltry free education, which serves only to keep them eligible to continue playing basketball for their school, in return for generating millions of dollars for their school.

Dr. Harry Edwards (2010) goes further equating sport to a microcosm of society: “Sport inevitably recapitulates the character, structure and dynamics of human and institutional relationships within and between societies and the ideological values and sentiments that motivate and rationalize those relationships” (p. 60). Consequently, sport is simply a microcosm of a broader racist, oppressive society.

### **Inequitable Education**

The context in which racialized youth come to participate in sport must include a discussion of the inequitable education system that marginalizes racialized youth.

Examination of Ontario’s education system is particularly important in light of its history – which is marred by racism and (the rarely publicized) segregation of Black students (Henry & Tator, 2009).

### *Resistance*

Numerous studies have determined that racialized youth can be resistant to Eurocentric educational systems in a variety of ways (Dei et al., 1997; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; James, 2005; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Wilson & White, 2001). This can manifest in opposition to the school system’s predominantly White teachers who can play a role in the social subjugation of racialized students, especially Black males (Dei et al., 1997; Wilson & White, 2001). More specifically racialized students demonstrate resistance by exhibiting little effort in school or by directing their effort towards entertaining class members; behaviours which oppose the Eurocentric educational

systems that do not engage racialized youth (Dei, et al., Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; James, 2005). Critical race theorists, Daniel Solorzano and Delores Delgado Bernal (2001), argue this type of resistance would be categorized as “self-defeating resistance” should the student(s) in opposition have a conscious critique of their educational/social oppression (p. 317). They also define two additional types of critical resistance. Conformist resistance “refers to the oppositional behaviour of students who are motivated by a need for social justice yet hold no critique of the systems of oppression” while transformational resistance “refers to student behavior that illustrates both a critique of oppression and a desire for social justice” (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 318-319).

Thankfully today more people working within Ontario’s education system are developing awareness of the system’s lack of equity, the prevalence of social oppression within Ontario schools and the immediate need for social justice. To this end, there has been an increase in the number and variety of alternative forms of education offered to students, including a growing number of ‘Alternative’ schools (such as the TDSB’s ‘Afrocentric’ schools) which serve as educational resistance to an Ontario educational system which still has strong Eurocentric undertones (Dei et al., 1997).

### *Establishing identity*

Identity is commonly thought to be a malleable fusion of individual characteristics including, but not limited to, “race, class, gender, and sexuality” (Dei et al., 1997, p. 27). Within an educational setting it is important to consider the “shifting and contingent character of racial boundaries because racialized individuals occupying different social locations are constantly negotiating what it means to be black” (Gosine, 2008, p. 329).

However, individual identity is also either encouraged or discouraged by a Black racial group identity that forms partly as an acknowledgment of White oppression (Gosine, 2008). As Gosine (2008) highlights, Black masculinity in particular is characterized by “athleticism, compulsory heterosexuality, and hypermasculinity” (p. 318; see also Abdel-Shehid, 2005). The concept of “fictive kinship” is employed by Fordham and Ogbu (1986) to understand “how a sense of collective identity enters into the process of schooling and affects academic achievement.” (p. 176). It acknowledges commonality in social experience as a result of Blackness and unites Black people around these shared experiences (Dei, et al., 1997; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Gosine, 2008).

The identities of Black diaspora living in the Western world may also be affected by what W.E.B. Du Bois referred to as “double consciousness,” or the simultaneous awareness of one’s cultural heritage and the Eurocentric culture in which one is presently situated (as cited in Gosine, 2008, p. 315). Dei et al. (1997) add to this stating that awareness of the Eurocentric culture in which Black male youth live causes “bicultural ambivalence,” further complicating the process of identity construction (p. 12).

Often Black students will discourage their fellow Black peers from exerting effort and/or achieving academically by describing them as ‘acting White’ (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). This can be understood as the Black student’s efforts to maintain group cultural identity and to simultaneously resist what they may perceive as being inundated with White cultural capital. In a study that examined the experiences of Black Canadians who had found success educationally and professionally, Gosine (2008) noted that the individuals studied, because of their investment in the dominant, meritocratic value system, reported experiences in which they felt they had to “defend or justify their



Blackness,” primarily to Black peers who subscribe to a narrow construction of Black identity (p. 307). Those that did attempt to distance themselves from Black group identity or “fictive kinship” often found it to be psychologically stressful as they were uncertain they would be accepted by Whites and knew that even trying would mean they would have difficulty identifying themselves as Black in the future (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986).

Gosine (2008) summarizes the difficulty that Black Canadians can have in navigating their way through “multiple social locations and statuses, many of which have been popularly portrayed as contradictory or mutually exclusive” (p. 313). Hall (1997) alluded to this in his critique of binaries. Still, while these individuals found identity boundaries constraining to individual agency and difficult to navigate, they seemed to be at times complicit in enforcing them (Gosine, 2008). All of this highlights the complexities and contradictions inherent to social identities in a global age. In challenging the dominant and ostensible notion of clearly bounded and easily distinguishable racialized categories, Gosine (2008) emphasizes the shifting, fluid, hybrid and diasporic nature of racial identity. According to Gosine, racialized identities are continually being decentred and destabilized by globalizing forces (e.g., migration, tourism, improvements in communications technology, etc.) along with intersections with class, gender, sexuality, and (dis)ability.

### *Eurocentrism*

As might be expected in a Eurocentric society, the education system in Canada is Eurocentric which proves problematic for racialized students (James, 2005). School is “a microcosm of society” which prepares students for what is anticipated to be their rightful

place within a Eurocentric society (Dei et al., 1997, p. 20; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; James, 2005). Within this system Black histories and epistemologies are largely marginalized so that Black students often feel that Black people are only included in the curriculum as victims of White racism (Dei et al., 1997).

Ontario's educational system values European "cultural capital and social knowledge," something which may prove to be an impediment to learning and achieving for people not from European backgrounds (Dei et al., 1997, p. 23). Nunn (1997) argues that the mandate of schools is to proliferate White ideology. James (2012b) goes further, stating that schools in Canada intend to maintain the status quo, reinforcing existing institutional and power structures while teaching expected values, behaviours and social norms so that upon graduation students may contribute to Eurocentric society. As James (2012b) writes: "standardization in terms of tests, educational materials, pedagogy, and content 'is antithetical to diversity because it suggests that all students live and operate in homogenous environments with equality of opportunity afforded to them'" (p. 483).

The equity crisis that is Eurocentricity is compounded by the dangerous discourse of colourblindness which many teachers subscribe to as proof that they are not racist (Dei et al., 1997). "Colourblind" teachers are oblivious to the prevalence of race and racism within schools and believe that the school system is not a racist system which consistently underserves racialized students (James, 2012b). Colourblindness also supports a meritocratic ideology.

It is for this reason that Black History Month and Black cultural clubs can be very important within a Eurocentric schooling context. They can provide Black students with motivation to attend school and add relevance to their schooling experiences as their

history, culture and perspectives are largely ignored (Spence, 2003). Yet as Dei et al. (1997) argue, Afrocentric extra-curricular activities can give teachers and administrators reason not to incorporate Black perspectives, culture and history into the curriculum.

Lastly, a Eurocentric school system means a lack of Black role models in Ontario schools (Dei et al., 1997). This disparity is an impediment to equitable education as Black teachers are generally better equipped than White teachers to cater to Black students' ways of learning and thirst for cultural relevance (Dei et al., 1997).

### *Stigma/stereotype*

Historically Black Americans were stigmatized as unintelligent by White Americans as a means of social subjugation (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). It is suspected that over the years that stigma has been internalized by some Black people (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Common stereotypes of Black male youth identified by James (2012b) include: immigrant, fatherless, troublemaker, athlete, and underachiever. These stereotypes serve to racialize the youth and then marginalize them within the educational system thereby affecting their futures (James, 2012b).

Black males are also subject to special supervision which results in their being disciplined more frequently (Dei et al., 1997). As a result many Black males become disengaged which in turn justifies racist presumptions made by teachers about Black males (James, 2012b). Canadian studies also indicate that teachers and administrators lead Black students, especially males into basic or vocational classes and will encourage athletic pursuits at the expense of academic achievement (James, 2005, 2012b; Spence, 2003). Black students may also face additional stigmatization because of the neighbourhood they live in (James, 2012a).

Social stereotypes affect how teachers and administrators treat students but also how students view themselves (Dei et al., 1997). Forcing Black students into basic and vocational classes causes students to perform at a lower level because of lowered self-esteem and disengagement from work perceived to be unchallenging and relatively meaningless (Wise, 2009).

Lastly, Gosine (2008) highlights the fact that Black students who are successful academically often feel stressed by the pressure of not only achieving for themselves but serving as role models for other Blacks and disproving stigma that affects Black students. Wise (2009) reinforces this sentiment:

According to Claude Steele's research, when persons are members of groups that face common and well-known stigmas or stereotypes and are then placed in a situation where their performance is subject to an evaluation that could result in their being viewed through the lens of the group stereotype – such as black students taking tests, confronted by the fear that if they do poorly, their performance might be seen as evidence of a group intelligence deficit – the anxiety generated is so intense as to often drive down performance, even when one is highly capable of performing the task in question (p. 108).

#### *Futility of education*

Black students may also disengage from education due to an understanding of the racist discrimination they will likely experience in the economy when they use their education to try to gain employment (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). This could mean further disinterest as Black students come to realize the jobs available to people with their level

of education will not afford them the wealth and power they desire as people living in a capitalist society (Dei et al., 1997). There is research that suggests Black people do in fact face discrimination in hiring and then with regard to promotions, raises and benefits (Ali, 2008; Dion & Kawakami, 1996; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Hage, 2000; Loewen, 2005; Wise, 2009)

*Results of educational inequity*

In the case of Black males, the White hegemonic structure of masculinities against which they are measured not only serves to marginalize and racialize them but also, as a consequence, leads to what Kimmel referred to as ‘chronic terrors of emasculation, emotional emptiness, and gendered rage that leave a wide swath of destruction in its wake’ (James, 2012b, p. 470).

In a more general sense James (2005) states that the disparity between a “school’s cultural values, repertoires, and expectations, and those of students” is indicative of the levels of academic success students will reach (p. 2).

There are plenty of Black students who persevere through an education system that is not designed for them to succeed. However, many Black students drop out of school and when this happens it is a result of experiences had both inside and outside of school (Dei et al., 1997). Dropping out may represent the final act of resistance by a student escaping an oppressive situation in which the student felt subjugated and that what was being taught had no meaning in their lives (Dei et al., 1997).

Dei et al. (1997) argues that drop-outs are a social necessity in Ontario. “The social formation, with its segmentation of the labour force, and the consequent unequal

distributions of rewards, penalties, valued goods and services, knowledge etc., requires the existence of drop-outs in order for the economic system to function” (Dei et al., 1997, p. 195). They also astutely acknowledge that plenty of drop-outs go back to school later on and end up succeeding which indicates that the phenomenon of dropping out may be indicative of the educational system rather than individual potential.

### **Spatial Segregation**

#### *What is meant by space?*

Nelson (2006) writes that space “has always been political and strategic” (p. 256). Carrington (1998) adds to this sentiment explaining that space is not only geographic but involves “socioeconomic, cultural, and political discourses” (p. 294). Together these meanings come to define spaces that individuals navigate and then reify. Yet, as James (2012a) points out, spaces such as neighbourhoods and communities also act on individuals. Furthermore, people commonly use the spaces from which an individual comes to evaluate that individual (James, 2012a). Siciliano (2010) argues that the way in which spaces are constructed plays an instrumental role in the definition of criminality; a notion that will be elaborated on later under the section Racialized Criminality.

#### *Who regulates space?*

Just as Eurocentricity governs Ontario’s education system it also has an impact on the way space is defined as well as who has access to it in Ontario. Certain Whites in positions of power perceive Black people (especially Black males) to be threatening and so they make concerted efforts to ensure that they do not share the same spaces often (Carrington, 1998). White government exerts its power to “oversee, control, and regulate the behaviour of Black people” (Carrington, 1998, p. 283). This can be achieved by

pushing Black people to the margins of society geographically or removing them from mainstream society with the help of the criminal justice system.

Then, Black people further regulate the spaces to which they are allotted according to social classes. W.E.B. Du Bois noted that the Black bourgeoisie attempts to disassociate with Black people from lower social classes (Wacquant, 2001). Nelson (2006) adds to this sentiment writing that the Black underclass and the space which it occupies represents “moral degeneracy, natural inferiority, and repulsiveness” to the rest of society (p. 255).

*How is space regulated?*

The injustice of geographically marginalizing a group of people based on race is not deemed immoral by Whites because it abides by Eurocentric law (Nelson, 2006). “Use of violence, threats, law, and official policy; informal means such as freeze-outs and buyouts; suburban methods including zoning and public planning,” comprise some of the strategies used to create all-White spaces (Loewen, 2005, p. 91-92). Loewen notes that census statistics can be particularly telling: “expulsions and prohibitions often lurk behind the census statistics” (Loewen, 2005, p. 10). Spatial segregation based on race can result from a mix of institutional restrictions and social pressures (Loewen, 2005).

While all-White communities may not be as prevalent in Canada as they are in the United States racialized Canadians must still exhibit significant Canadian cultural capital if they are to be accepted by Canada’s Eurocentric society. This means that certain, often undesirable space, is the only place in which racialized people are tolerated (Nelson, 2006). This undesirable space is sometimes asked to contain things that White

communities would simply not accept like garbage dumps, various types of pollution and other stigmatized members of society such as the homeless (Nelson, 2006).

Novac et al. (2002) suggest that in Canada Black people are particularly at risk of suffering housing discrimination. Housing discrimination in Canada today may not consist of an act as obvious as denial of housing but could include nuanced strategies such as “charging certain people higher prices or rents for housing, applying more stringent or inappropriate screening criteria to some people, or treating certain residents differently from other residents” (Novac et al., 2002, p. 1).

During Pierre Elliot Trudeau’s tenure as Prime Minister of Canada in the 1970s social and political changes were made which would change Canada’s population forever. Canada began to exercise a relatively indiscriminate immigration policy (Siciliano, 2010). This meant that new generations of Canadians had unique social locations – being born in Canada to parents who had immigrated from elsewhere (Ali, 2008). However, regardless of birthplace, most non-White people living in Canada are still assumed to be from a country other than Canada (Ali, 2008). These individuals are often asked where they are really from (Ali, 2008). In restricting racialized peoples’ abilities to identify themselves as “Canadian,” racialized people are forced into binary identities such as “Chinese-Canadian” (Ali, 2008). In light of the resistance they face in identifying themselves as Canadian these individuals also do not feel they are granted complete access to mainstream society (Ali, 2008).

Yet, because these youth grow up in communities with other youth who have been marginalized on the basis of their race they are surprised by the resistance they experience when they attempt to integrate into mainstream society (Ali, 2008). Their



schools and neighbourhoods exhibit what they believe to be multiculturalism (Ali, 2008). The conflation of the stigma attached to these spaces (racialized schools and neighbourhoods) and the discrimination the youth face because of their race, ethnicity, class and gender make the process of attaining the financial capital they desire incredibly complex and challenging (Ali, 2008). They come to understand that White power and privilege remain intact in Canada and that negotiation of their identities could be the only way to receive more equitable treatment (Ali, 2008).

*Symbiosis of ghetto and prison*

While the ghetto may serve as a way to confine a city's racialized populace to marginal space(s), the criminal justice system works to remove individuals from society all together. Wacquant (2001) states that the criminal justice system is a receptacle for Black male youth who, as a continuation of thorough social discrimination, are not accepted by the job market. Wacquant (2001) argues that the spike in incarceration occurred as the ghetto was no longer capable of storing so many racialized people. As Toronto trends towards the disappearance of the middle class this may be a phenomenon that could begin to appear in Canada (Hulchanski, 2010).

Wacquant (2001) argues that today the criminal justice system works with the ghetto to oppress racialized social groups, namely Black people, in the United States. Wacquant (2001) refers to the ghetto as a peculiar institution of social control; of which it is the third after slavery and Jim Crow laws in the United States. Although females are becoming targeted more and more often by the criminal justice system Wacquant maintains that it is usually the men who are imprisoned while the women remain

confined to the ghetto (Wacquant, 2001). Wacquant (2001) describes how the prison has begun to resemble the ghetto and vice versa:

Specifying the workings of the ghetto as mechanism of ethnoracial closure and control makes readily visible its structural and functional kinship with the prison: the ghetto is a manner of 'ethnoracial prison' in that it encloses a stigmatized population which evolves within it its distinctive organizations and culture, while the prison functions as a 'judicial ghetto' relegating individuals disgraced by criminal conviction to a secluded space harboring the parallel social relations and cultural norms that make up the 'society of captives' (p. 103).

In segregating the city it becomes easier to deny the city's racialized populace of equitable schooling and social services (Loewen, 2005). Once spatial segregation has been established racialized people have a more difficult time joining the social networks that will gain them access to better employment (Loewen, 2005). Furthermore, the segregation of neighbourhoods allows for privileged Whites to maintain their stereotypes about racialized people as they do not come into contact with people who would disprove the stereotypes (Loewen, 2005). This causes a vicious cycle as the stereotypes then justify keeping racialized people out of the White neighbourhoods in the first place (Loewen, 2005). Nelson (2006) argues that the geographical marginalization of a group of people also allows the group that forced the marginalization to forget about their role in the other group's suffering.

*The existence of spatial segregation in Toronto*

In 2007, David Hulchanski conducted research that examined the meanings and consequences of spatial segregation in Toronto. He argued that Toronto is composed of three separate “cities,” each with its own distinct characteristics. In essence City #1 is situated in Toronto’s core, City #2 wraps around City #1 and City #3 occupies Toronto’s periphery (Hulchanski, 2010). The greatest disparity is evident when examining the data compiled on City #1 versus that of City #3. In 2005, the average income earned by individuals 15 years or older in City #1 was \$88, 400, while people from the same demographic living in City #3 earned \$26, 900 (Hulchanski, 2010). Yet, the differences only begin there. City #1 is 82% White and 2% Black, while City #3 is 34% White and 12% Black (Hulchanski, 2010). “In 2006, 61% of residents 25 years and over in City #1 had a university certificate, diploma, or degree, compared to 31% of the same age group in City #3,” which may serve as proof of inequitable education within the city (Hulchanski, 2010). Most of the Toronto’s remaining labour jobs lie in City #3, which may be due to the persistent stereotype that Black people represent exploitable manual labour (Hulchanski, 2010). Moreover, City #3 has the worst access to transit and must travel the furthest to get into City #1 (Hulchanski, 2010). In addition, violence and crime manifest in neighbourhoods and communities which are both low-income and high density (Hidalgo 1997; López, 2002 as cited in James, 2012a).

**Racialized Criminalization***Black as immigrant/unauthentic Canadian/‘Other’*

“First, black folks, and more specifically black men, are read as criminal within the national imaginary and are both figuratively and literally placed at the nation’s

margins” (Abdel-Shehid, 2005, p. 34). As Abdel-Shehid and others have outlined, racialized Canadians remain perpetual immigrants and unauthentic Canadians which plays an integral role in their criminalization (Ali, 2008; Gosine, 2008). In other words, Blackness is not conceived as Canadian. This means that injustices perpetrated by the Canadian criminal justice system can go relatively unnoticed because “real” or “authentic” Canadians are not the ones being criminalized at disproportionately high rates.

The criminalization of Black males in Canada is also enabled by a socially entrenched stereotype which links Black masculinity with criminality (Abdel-Shehid, 2005). It is argued by Leonard (2010) that the stereotype that positions Black males as deviant and naturally criminal is so strong that a “criminalblackman dyad” has been established in the social imagination. In this social context the notion of criminality triggers images of Black males. Once this identity has secured its place within the social imagination then the marginalization of the group as a whole becomes possible as the rest of society believes it to be just (Abdel-Shehid, 2005).

Although the Black male is thought to be associated with criminal behaviour in Canada there are other indicators which can be used in conjunction with race as proof of criminality. According to Gamal Abdel-Shehid (2005), clothing can be read as one such indication. “Black men can be read as “gangstas” who disrupt Canadian notions of “cleanliness,” “decorum,” and “order,” all of which are coded, both historically and contemporarily, as White (p. 32). However, Black male youth who have accumulated enough European (i.e., Canadian) “cultural capital” may be permitted to be exceptions (James, 2005).

This stereotype is devastating as a Black male who “looks like or seems like” a “criminalblackman” is treated by other members of society as if he is in fact a criminal (Alexander, 2012, p. 162; Leonard, 2010). This treatment is not only meted out by police and teachers but by neighbours and potential employees as well (Alexander, 2012). Blacks are thought to be of low morality and to break the law for internal reasons such as character flaws (Alexander, 2012). In contrast, Whites are thought to break the law for external reasons, such as abusive parents or spouse, or reasons beyond their control like mental illness (Alexander, 2012).

The permanence of a stigma and the inability to avoid it can result in the stigmatized embracing the stigma as a final means of coping with something over which they have no control (Alexander, 2012). “Indeed, the act of embracing one’s stigma is never merely a psychological maneuver; it is a political act – an act of resistance and defiance in a society that seeks to demean a group based on an inalterable trait” (Alexander, 2012, p. 171).

Furthermore, Wacquant (2001) suggests that there is a growing trend of Black males being validated as real or authentic by going to prison and being processed by the justice system. This could be partly attributed to Black male youths embracing the criminal stigma affixed to them as well as an acknowledgement of a Black culture which partly defines itself in opposition to that of White culture (Alexander, 2012; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Gosine, 2008)

### *Media*

Media have a substantial influence over public perception (Henry, Hastings & Freer, 1996). As such, a significant portion of Canada’s populace gains its insights about

criminality from media sources (Henry, Hastings & Freer, 1996). As Oriola, Neverson and Adeyanju (2012) described, media is characterized by “immediacy, personalization, and extraordinariness” (p. 69). As a result the interpretative framework that media uses to share a narrative or describe a problem is often the framework that the public then uses to understand the information (Ezeonu, 2008). For example, the Toronto Star chose to attribute the unusually high amount of gun violence in Toronto during 2005 to gangs, drug trafficking and illegal guns, social conditions in impoverished neighbourhoods, and/or a Jamaican culture of violence (Ezeonu, 2008; Siciliano, 2010).

The media does not report objectively. Instead it is influenced by a variety of institutions, some of which have vested interests in the frameworks used to capture the story or issue. These can include, police, corporations and those about whom the story is being told (Ezeonu, 2008). Most intriguingly Toronto Police have been known to provide media with information that they believe could serve their needs (Ezeonu, 2008).

#### *Colourblindness within the criminal justice system*

The criminal justice system is one of the main ways in which the ideology of colourblindness is spread throughout society. As Alexander (2012) argues colourblindness is the means by which subjugation and the creation of a social under-caste is made possible. Once an individual is labeled a “criminal” many of the forms of discrimination historically suffered by racialized people which are no longer socially acceptable, become socially acceptable once again (Alexander, 2012). While Black Canadians are not criminalized at the same rate as Black Americans and while the two countries differ in their treatment of those released from prison, the ideology of colourblindness does result in racialized Canadians being criminalized at a higher rate

(Alexander, 2012; Wortley, 2003). As is the case in the United States, those criminalized in Canada can have a difficult time gaining re-entry into mainstream society (Alexander, 2012; Wacquant, 2001; Wortley, 2003). Denial of certain rights combined with the social stigma attached to those who have been criminalized can be debilitating (Alexander, 2012; Wacquant, 2001).

Furthermore, more intense police surveillance in Black neighbourhoods is enabled by a colourblind discourse. By referring to certain neighbourhoods as “high-priority” or “criminally inclined” police can target racialized neighbourhoods while avoiding being thought of as racially discriminatory. The Toronto Police Service’s TAVIS (Toronto Anti-Violence Intervention Strategy), which is currently in use, allows officers to put Black people, and more specifically Black males, under more intense police watch (Siciliano, 2010).

#### *Racial prejudice throughout the criminal justice system*

Racial discrimination is ubiquitous throughout Ontario’s criminal justice system. The entire system is indicative of a Bias Model framework of criminality which Wortley (2003) describes as characterized by systemic and overt racial discrimination. “Racial profiling is said to exist when the members of certain racial groups become subject to greater levels of criminal justice surveillance than other citizens” (Wortley, 2003, p. 103). On the corollary, in 1992 the Report of the Commission on systematic racism in the Ontario Criminal Justice System found that “93% of black, 91% of Chinese and 87% of white respondents thought that the Metro Toronto police treat black people worse than white people” (Ezeonu, 2008, p 52).

Black males are more likely to be stopped and searched in Toronto than are Black females or people of either gender from any other racial group (Wortley, 2003). Among Black males it is older, wealthier individuals who are most likely to be stopped and searched, leading one to believe that an effort is being made by White multiculturalists to maintain the oppression of Black males (Hage, 2000; Wortley, 2003). “The *Star*’s analysis of arrest data from the Toronto Police Service revealed that Black people are highly over-represented in certain offence categories – including drug possession, drug trafficking, and serious violence” (Wortley, 2003, p. 100).

Once charged with a crime Black males are not likely to receive help from jurors or judges selected from a society that is proven to be discriminatory against Blacks (Henry, Hastings & Freer, 1996). A poll conducted using a random sample of Toronto area residents “found that nearly half (45%) believed that there was a relationship between a person’s ethnicity or racial background and the likelihood that he (she) will be involved in crime” (Henry, Hastings & Freer, 1996, p. 471). The same poll revealed that 46% of residents believed that West Indians (Jamaicans, Trinidadians and others) were inherently criminal. Nineteen percent of those polled thought Blacks in general were inherently criminal. So entrenched in racial prejudice is Ontario’s criminal justice system that, the Court of Appeals for Ontario acknowledged its ubiquity in 1993 with the “Parks decision”. The decision allows “any black accused to challenge the potential jurors on their attitudes towards blacks” (Henry, Hastings & Freer, 1996, p. 470).

Black male Torontonians are more often denied bail and held in custody prior to their trial than are males of other races (Wortley, 2003). If released on bail, racial minorities are restricted by more pre-trial conditions (such as curfews) than Whites



(Wortley, 2003). Moreover, Black males charged with a crime in Ontario are more likely to be convicted and sentenced to time in prison particularly when the offence in question is drug-related (Wortley, 2003). It is not surprising then to find that Black people comprise roughly two percent of the Canadian population, yet account for over 6 percent of Canada's federal prison population (Wortley, 2003).

Once incarcerated, minorities are more likely to be charged with prison misconducts which can then result in denials for parole and limited access to temporary release programs (Wortley, 2003). "Finally, since racial minorities are subject to a great number of pre-trial release conditions – and are more likely to be arbitrarily stopped and investigated by the police – they are much more likely to re-enter the system with a breach of condition charge" (Wortley, 2003, p.106).

#### *Understanding criminalization*

It should be understood that Blacks are perceived as inherently criminal, watched more carefully by police, and discriminated against all the way through the criminal justice system. Further, crime itself is defined in a manner designed to focus on Blacks while simultaneously ignoring Whites. Once this is understood, one may examine why Blacks may engage in "criminal activity" as it has come to be defined.

Esteemed sociologist Robert Merton argues that criminal tendencies are developed when the drive for material capital cannot be satisfied legally (Ezeonu, 2008). Feldman and Weisfeld (1973) added to this sentiment when they theorized that crime is related to the perceived benefits of crime in achieving financial or material capital versus the desirability and reality of legal work. In addition, the likelihood of detainment or

arrest plus the expected severity of a subsequent punishment if convicted are also factors (Feldman & Weisfeld, 1973).

Moreover, Alexander (2012) explains that poor people do not have the same access to private space as wealthy people so while they do not engage in an inordinate amount of criminal activity they are more likely to be seen if behaving criminally.

Wortley (2003) suggests that experiences of discrimination and joblessness lead men in particular to engage in criminal behaviour, especially violence. Oriola, Neverson and Adeyanju (2012) describe the allure of drugs in particular:

The working class, in particular, use drugs to cope with their experiences of alienation and oppression manufactured and/or exacerbated by capitalist wage work. Dealing in drugs can also be a means for the marginalized to avoid repressive market relations: 'many individuals sell drugs because the hours are more flexible, they do not have a boss standing over them eight or more hours a day, and the remuneration can be better than that received for wage work at the bottom end of the labour market (p. 75).

This chapter provided a review of literature and made visible the critical theoretical foundation that underpins this research inquiry. In the next chapter, I delineate my research methodology and provide justification as to how methodological decisions were made.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

The purpose of my research was to use a qualitative, interview-based methodology to examine the schooling and sport experiences of racialized male youth from Toronto's Rexdale community.

The following three research questions guided my inquiry:

1. How do racialized male youth from Rexdale experience their community?
2. What is the role of school in the lives of racialized youth from Rexdale?
3. In what ways do race, class and gender intersect to shape the sporting experiences of male youth from Rexdale?

As a researcher, I am situated within the critical theorist paradigm. Critical theorists examine power as it relates to the intersecting elements of social identities including, but not limited to, race, sex, gender, and class (Willis, 2007; Hylton, 2010). As such, I aimed to examine the various power relations that impact the social identities of the participants in my research, as well as my own social identity as a researcher (Liamputtong, 2009). A critical approach was integral to beginning to understand the lives of racialized male youth from Rexdale as well as the social context within which their participation in school and sport occurs.

Furthermore, I was hopeful that during the course of this project my research would, like the work of other critical theorists, progress towards challenging existing social inequities and injustices while empowering and emancipating the participants (Creswell, 2007). Yet, as Kleinman, Copp and Henderson (1997) wrote "we cannot know at the outset where a project will lead us and what will be important about it" (p. 491). Critical theorists also critique dominant social ideology and paradigms, wishing to

expose social hegemony and inequities to those oppressed (Willis, 2007). They believe that those people responsible for perpetrating oppression structure social and political systems in a calculated way so that oppressed people are not aware that concentrated efforts are being made to maintain their subjugation (Willis, 2007). I aspired to elucidate these intangible systems not only for those who continue to suffer at their expense but also for those who support and benefit from them.

### **The Development of My Research Project**

In order to properly contextualize my methodology I must begin by describing its evolution. In October 2011, I read about a pilot project entitled Prevention Intervention Toronto (PIT). The project piqued my interest and I immediately got in contact with the organizers. It was at this point that my research began to take shape and I began to envision conducting research which would focus on the meanings that school and sport have in the lives of racialized male youth in Rexdale.

The goal of PIT was to help youth, aged 13-24 years old, who were having legal problems and seeking support. After contacting Jewish Vocational Services, the organization responsible for facilitating the project, I was told that the third and final cohort would soon be completing their program. That notwithstanding, I was put in contact with two social workers at the Rexdale site who decided that, given my experience as an educator, I could serve as a tutor in a program that helped prepare young adults for their General Educational Development (GED) exam. This role granted me access to a community that would have been extraordinarily difficult for me, a true outsider, to otherwise gain access. The tutoring program was facilitated out of the Albion Public Library in Rexdale. From December 2011 until March 2012 I volunteered twice a

week with another graduate student named Xalimo<sup>2</sup> who grew up in Rexdale and had done a lot of work within the community. Together we supported the youth in their preparation for the exam by helping them work through a GED preparation text book.

Unfortunately the program was put on hiatus in March due to a strike, which resulted in the closure of all Toronto Public Libraries. When the libraries re-opened the program was terminated as the funding which paid for its facilitation had run out. As my role in the program regretfully came to an end I came to an agreement with Khadar, one of the social workers who helped me get involved with the GED exam preparation course. Khadar assured me that I would be able to return to the YMCA Rexdale Youth Resource Centre<sup>3</sup> where he worked to interview some of the male youth for my research.

However, as I will outline in this chapter, there were numerous other obstacles that impacted my ability to recruit research participants from Rexdale which, in turn, significantly impacted my data collection. Given these challenges, I was required to adapt my research plan several times as a result of the incredible amount of difficulty I had recruiting participants. It is within this context that the process of data collection truly began.

## **Data Collection**

### *Sampling*

I used purposive sampling to recruit informants who were capable of providing me with information-rich cases (Liamputtong, 2009). Criterion sampling, a purposive

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<sup>2</sup>This name, like all names hereafter, is a pseudonym. Pseudonyms are used (as per the participant consent forms) in place of individuals' actual names in an effort to protect the identities of those involved in the research.

<sup>3</sup>The Rexdale YRC stands opposite Albion Library on the north side of Albion Road. A variety of social services are offered at the centre but the building does not offer recreational space and recreational programs are not part of the centre's focus.

sampling strategy, was used to interview racialized male youth aged 15-21 years old from the Rexdale community who participate in sports as well as social workers who work with such youth (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). I interviewed youth from this age group to understand their experiences in school and sport during a time at which they were likely to be either currently enrolled in secondary school or very recently enrolled. I also attempted to use snowball sampling to recruit additional informants by asking participants to tell their family and friends about my research but this strategy did not yield any more participants (Liamputtong, 2009).

### *Recruitment*

As stated above I experienced significant problems recruiting individuals to participate in my research. These problems largely stemmed from the fact that, despite my volunteer work, I was an outsider to the community and the participants who informed my research. Initially, Khadar had agreed to act as a gatekeeper for my research (Liamputtong, 2009). He told me that I could return to the Rexdale Youth Resource Centre (YRC) and interview some of the male athletes who had aspired to attend American universities on basketball scholarships but had never realized their goals for various reasons. Khadar assured me that he could help set up several interviews with these athletes. As someone who worked with Rexdale's youth and had grown up in the community it appeared that Khadar would be the ideal gatekeeper for my research (Liamputtong, 2009).

Yet, once I had received ethical clearance for my research from the university, I had a lot of difficulty re-connecting with Khadar. After several weeks, and numerous attempts to contact him, I learned that Khadar was no longer employed at the Rexdale

YRC and that he would not be able to help me with participant recruitment. Having lost my most valuable connection to the community, I called the Rexdale YRC once again in hopes of gaining some assistance from another community leader. Through these efforts I was able to gain the support of Michelle – another one of the centre’s social workers – but only one focus group resulted from her conscientious assistance. Without a gatekeeper’s connections and having already suffered multiple delays I was forced to adopt other participant recruitment strategies. I realized I would need to be more determined, autonomous, creative and flexible in my pursuit of potential interviewees.

This was not the only part of my participant recruitment blueprint that did not come to fruition. I had planned to create a poster for the bulletin board in the Rexdale YRC describing the demographic that I sought to interview with a reference to a \$20 financial stipend I planned to offer. It was important to me that participants be offered some form of remuneration for their time and insights. I also asked Michelle if I could use one of the conference rooms at the Rexdale YRC as a venue for my focus groups and individual interviews and she said that would be fine.

While the posters did receive more exposure than I had initially anticipated thanks to Michelle’s distribution this initiative did not result in any interviews. Furthermore, the \$20 financial stipend became pizza and soft drinks for the focus group members and Tim Horton’s gift cards for the individual interviewees. Lastly, only one interview took place in a Rexdale YRC conference room.

Over three and a half months of data collection, including many unsuccessful attempts to recruit participants, a total of 13 participants were interviewed for this research – 10 youth and 3 social workers. During this time I was able to conduct four

small focus groups (each with only two or three participants) and four individual interviews.<sup>4</sup> Despite the struggle to recruit participants these methods resulted in over 180 pages of raw data.

### *Participants*

Within this research, I did not want to reinforce the concepts of “perpetual immigration and/or unauthentic Canadian identity” in which racialized Canadians are automatically assumed to be born elsewhere (Ali, 2008; Gosine, 2008). The Canadian-ness of the individuals who participated in this research is not to be disputed. However, I do want to acknowledge the racial diversity of the participants I interviewed with the use of Statistics Canada’s categorization of ethno-cultural and racialized groups as outlined in *The Colour of Democracy* (2009) by Henry and Tator. For example, participants with a Bangladeshi, Indian (India), Pakistani or Sri Lankan background are referred to as South Asian. In the interest of greater specificity I may at points describe individuals’ ethnic backgrounds using hyphenated identifiers (such as Somali-Canadian). Once again, this should not be misunderstood as an attempt to pigeonhole individuals or to question the authenticity of their claims to Canadian identity.

In light of the disparity between my methodological plan and the methodology I ultimately used, I would like to briefly describe who my participants were and how I managed to talk with them. The following chart lists the pseudonyms of all participants in chronological order, their occupation at the time of their participation and the location of our discussion:

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<sup>4</sup> The interview guides that I used for the interviews and focus groups I conducted can be found in the Appendices.



<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Location</b>
Inder	High school student	Rexdale Youth Resource Centre
Karamjeet	High school student	Rexdale Youth Resource Centre
Param	High school student	Rexdale Youth Resource Centre
Dwayne	Breaking The Cycle member	Breaking The Cycle
Thomas	Breaking The Cycle member	Breaking The Cycle
Gary	Breaking The Cycle social worker	Breaking The Cycle
Sohaib	High school student	Rexdale Community Hub
Gullede	Recent high school graduate working at the airport	Rexdale Community Hub
Mahad	High school student	Rexdale Community Hub
John	High school student	Rexdale Alliance Church
Connor	High school student	Rexdale Alliance Church
Jamal	Somali Youth Association of Toronto social worker	Somali Youth Association of Toronto
John	High school student	Phone call
Xalimo	Master's student and community social worker	Somali Youth Association of Toronto

The three participants in my first focus group – Inder, Karamjeet and Param – agreed to take part after Michelle informed their youth group about my research. Each of these participants are of South Asian background. It was after Michelle helped me recruit these first three participants that I faced my biggest recruitment challenge.

My second focus group was held in a location where Breaking The Cycle is facilitated. Breaking The Cycle is a program designed to reduce gang activity in Toronto. The focus group came as a result of me reaching out to Gary – one of the program's social workers whom I had met while facilitating the GED program at the Albion Library. The two participants – Dwayne and Thomas – agreed to take part after they were

convinced by Gary. Both participants are Black (African Black; American Black; Canadian Black; West Indian and Caribbean Black; other Black) young adults. Having really only participated out of respect for Gary the two youth provided very little useful data. Although this focus group did not generate much data I was able to interview Gary when it was over. Gary is a Black adult and was the first of four individual interviews.

My third focus group resulted from Xalimo telling Jamal, a social worker with the Somali Youth Association of Toronto (SOYAT), about my research. After I met Jamal at the Rexdale Community Hub he asked some of the youth from the Somali Men's Basketball League<sup>5</sup> to participate. I was able to come back and interview Sohaib, Gullede and Mahad after one of their league games. These Black youth each have Somali backgrounds and are practicing Muslims. The focus group was conducted at the Hub, an old high school that had recently been renovated and re-designated as a community centre. The Hub provides members of the community with health, social, legal, employment and cultural services. Unlike the Rexdale YRC the Community Hub offers a gymnasium for recreation.

My fourth focus group was facilitated out of the Rexdale Alliance Church. The church offered some recreational space and equipment but did not have a gymnasium. I was given the opportunity to recruit participants from the church's youth group after one of my Dad's co-workers, who attended the church, offered to inform the youth group leaders about my research. This final focus group had two participants, John and Connor. John is Black and the other participant, Connor, is half White (British; European; South, Central, and North Americans of Caucasian background; Russian; Ukrainian; others of

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<sup>5</sup> Jamal is the founder of the Somali Men's Basketball League.

Caucasian background) and half South Asian. I would later conduct a follow-up interview with John, over the telephone, in order to gain more in-depth data.

Prior to my telephone interview with John, I conducted an individual interview at the SOYAT offices with Jamal, the social worker who had helped me recruit participants from the SABL. Jamal is a Black adult of Somali descent and a practicing Muslim.

After my follow-up interview with John I conducted my fourth interview with Xalimo – a Black female adult of Somali descent and a practicing Muslim. This final interview also took place at the SOYAT offices.

### *Methods*

This project utilized interviews as the primary method of data collection. However, I also relied on reflexive journal writing as a tertiary means of data collection (Ellis et al., 2008). I began reflexive journaling from the time I started volunteering in the GED exam preparation course and continued writing entries until my final interview.

I decided to use focus groups as it is a method of data collection which lends itself to deep, meaningful data that are co-produced by participants (Liamputtong, 2009). Additionally, Khan and Manderson (as cited in Liamputtong, 2009) state that focus groups are used with the intention of “describing and understanding perceptions, interpretations, and beliefs of a select population to gain understanding of a particular issue from the perspective of the group’s participants” (1992, p. 57). In the focus groups the youth were given the opportunity to supplement each other’s thoughts and critique each other’s opinions. It is argued that this form of discussion can provide richer and more insightful data compared with individual interviews (Liamputtong, 2009).

Also, focus groups have been known to be especially effective when the moderator has a different socio-cultural background from those of the people informing the research (Liamputtong, 2009). This, as I have already described, was the case in my research. Focus groups can be used to empower marginalized and subjugated social groups by providing them with a platform from which to share their experiences and tell their stories (Liamputtong, 2009).

Individual interviews were used to follow up with a participant from one of the focus groups and to gain the insights of three leaders from Rexdale who are involved in various social organizations within the community.

I used semi-structured interviews (see Appendix for Interview Guide) so that I could engage the informants, obtain thick descriptions of their experiences and take part in the co-production of data (Willis, 2007; Creswell, 2007). As an interviewer, I aimed to pose questions and take a step back, providing the participants with plenty of freedom to share their experiential knowledge (Liamputtong, 2009). I intervened as infrequently as possible but I prompted the participants with questions when I deemed it necessary to do so. I wanted my research to be mostly a reflection of the participants' counterstories facilitated by me to the greater community – both academic and non-academic. When no new topics or insights appeared to emerge in the interviews and the youth felt they had no more to share the interviews came to an end. Having struggled greatly to recruit participants to take part in four focus groups and four individual interviews I fell short of the sample size I had hoped to generate. However, the thirteen participants who did take part in the research provided valuable data. Once I exhausted all avenues for obtaining additional participants I began the process of data analysis (Liamputtong, 2009).

**Data Analysis**

Each interview and focus group was transcribed verbatim (Patton, 2002; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008). Accurate transcription of the interviews was extremely important as it ensured that the participants' counterstories were correctly represented in the final product (Willis, 2007). However, it should be noted that I have taken the liberty of removing unnecessary words (such as 'like' or 'umm') and parts of sentences from some of the participants' quotes. In no instance did these minor revisions change the meaning of what the participants said. On the contrary, the revisions were made as a way of highlighting the seminal insights of the people who drove this research.

Once I finished transcribing I began a two-step data analysis process. First, I engaged in inductive analysis by reading and then re-reading the transcripts, thereby familiarizing myself with the data. Next I engaged in a very meticulous, detailed coding process. At this point I began identifying themes that I could see emerging from the codes. Second, I engaged in deductive analysis as I drew on CRT to locate the analysis within a critical framework. Throughout the data analysis process I made every effort to ensure that I co-created meaning with the informants as a facilitator of their counterstories (Creswell, 2007).

**Ethical Considerations**

According to Brock University's Research Ethics Board guidelines individuals under the age of 18 need parental consent in order to participate in research. It was very important for the consent forms to be written in a way so that they would be understood by those whose signatures were required.

I made an effort to keep the identity of those included in my reflexivity journals anonymous and I did so throughout my research. Confidentiality was critical. However, I was also prepared to strike a balance between the maintenance of the participants' trust in me and my legal obligations to report information that could be integral to criminal cases as Venkatesh (2008) described in his book *Gang Leader for a Day*.

Furthermore, I gave the social workers at the YMCA Rexdale Youth Resource Centre a copy of the interview questions in advance but informed them that the interviews were semi-structured in nature (Willis, 2007).

Finally, as a researcher I believe that reciprocity is an ethical obligation and I believe that knowledge dissemination is one of its most important components (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008). As Kvale and Brinkmann (2008) noted there are ways of disseminating knowledge in qualitative research besides the traditional approach of publishing journal articles that are likely to result in dissemination to a wider audience. It is with the very intention of reaching a wider audience that I plan to write a community newspaper article or an article for a YMCA newsletter about the participants' experiences as a means of further disseminating knowledge created through my research. I feel that doing this will also contribute towards the overall reciprocity of my research.

### **Trustworthiness**

Lincoln and Guba (1984) contend that the trustworthiness of qualitative research is a function of its credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. They explain that trustworthiness is achieved when a researcher is able to demonstrate that the findings of his or her research are worth knowing.

Engaging in methods triangulation through the collection of data from semi-structured interviews, semi-structured focus groups and reflexive journaling helped to increase the credibility of my research (Liamputtong, 2009; Patton, 2002; Willis, 2007). I spent as much time as I could in the field by volunteering in the GED exam preparation course and subsequently connecting with Rexdale's community leaders and male youth alike. While these efforts may not have resulted in as many focus groups or interviews as I would have liked they did add credibility to my research (Lincoln & Guba, 1984).

Though I had set out to do member checking as another means of increasing credibility I realized once I was in the field that it was simply not pragmatic. As I have outlined one of my biggest challenges in this research was participant recruitment. Extreme efforts were required to sit down with most of the people who informed my research. For some this meant multiple re-scheduled meetings. Some scheduled meetings never came to fruition. Even with individuals' cell phone numbers it was often very difficult to connect with potential informants. It is for these reasons that I was unable to engage in member checking with my participants.

In regards to transferability my primary objective was to obtain meaningful, rich data from my fieldwork. Lincoln and Guba (1984) state that the transferability of research can only be determined by someone reading the research and that the best a researcher can do in this vein is to ensure that descriptions are thorough. To this end, I have provided detailed descriptions of the fieldwork and the research process, including the obstacles I faced, in an effort to be transparent.

The dependability of the data generated in this study is not only a reflection of my efforts to maintain prolonged engagement within the community of Rexdale, which

began with volunteering in the tutoring program facilitated out of the Albion public library, but also the gatekeepers who assisted in my participant recruitment and helped me build relationships within the Rexdale Y.R.C and the other community sites in which I conducted research. The more comfortable people felt talking to me the more likely it was that I received rich, dependable data. It is important that I also acknowledge, as I do in the data analysis chapters, that there were some participants with whom relationship building was not successful and this did limit the amount of in-depth data generated in one of my focus groups.

Finally, in order for my research to achieve a high level of confirmability I conducted methodologically rigorous research (Patton, 2002). It began by carefully constructing an interview plan from which to conduct interviews. As it turned out I was forced to adapt my interview plan as I confronted the aforementioned obstacles during the course of my research. When data collection was finally complete I tirelessly reviewed the data multiple times in order to ensure that I did the data analytical justice (Patton, 2002). I am also of the belief that research must be conducted with integrity throughout. Still, I feel that researchers benefit greatly when their work is examined from the objective perspective of fellow academics. It is for this reason that I conducted an audit trail which allowed my thesis advisor to examine my research process to determine if it followed a logical progression (Liamputtong, 2009). Lincoln and Guba (1984) suggest that an audit trail can be used in conjunction with triangulation and a reflexive journal to achieve a high level of confirmability.



**Researcher Reflexivity**

Reflexivity expresses a researcher's ability to honestly identify his or her own "experiences, beliefs, and personal history" and describe how they might impact his or her research (Liamputtong, 2009, p. 25). A researcher must also engage in self-reflection throughout the research process in order to conduct research characteristic of reflexivity (Liamputtong, 2009).

Reading critical race theory has aided my understanding of relationships of power in society and how social identity determines one's position in the social hierarchy. This awareness also necessitates that I, acknowledge the fact that my identity as a White, middle class, graduate student differed from the racialized youth and community leaders whom I interviewed. As Harding (1998) noted, it was important for me to – in an effort to maintain reflexivity – understand this difference and make every effort not to interpret the data from my perspective alone.

I entered Rexdale as a White, middle class, Master's student who was, at the time, living in St. Catharines, Ontario. I was privileged and I still am. These characteristics made me more than an outsider in the community. I was an alien. As Mensah (2010) pointed out, within hegemonic social discourse positive qualities are conceived as characteristic of Whiteness while negative qualities are conceived as characteristic of Blackness. It is very difficult to determine the exact effect that the opposing representations of Whiteness and Blackness had upon my research. However, identifying the polarity of these representations draws attention to the fact that my Whiteness had an immediate impact on my interactions with participants – even before words were exchanged.

Though my Whiteness may not have indicated to the members of the Rexdale community that I was an outsider with a conflicting world view, I am certain that it indicated neither familiarity nor the potential for a deep social connection. For some this gap was too much to overcome. For example, the two youth I interviewed from Breaking The Cycle – Dwayne and Thomas – were particularly guarded even after Gary vouched for me as someone he knew who had done work in the community. In this same regard, Jamal explained to me during our interview how he handpicked certain youth from the SMBL for me to interview:

...the kids that were doing the interview with you, it's like I selected certain kids... I've known those kids for a while and I know like – cause if I put anybody else in there they would have just gave you some bone-head answer. But the kids that I selected were – I knew that they can conduct themselves in a manner where they understand ok, this is important to him and we're gonna help him but, not only that, with information he takes he can write something good where someone else will be able to help not me, but maybe my brother.

Ellsworth (as cited in Henry & Tator, 2009, xxv-xxvi) described Whiteness as “a constantly shifting location upon complex maps of social, economic and political power.” So, beyond the repercussions that resulted from what my Whiteness represents to those who informed my research, the fact that the location of Whiteness does indeed shift “upon complex maps” means that my Whiteness affords me intangible privileges in nearly every context. For instance, in retrospect my Whiteness was a major factor in my

being offered admission to a graduate program. Consequently, my Whiteness was influential in my having the opportunity to conduct this very research.

In order to fully appreciate the privileges that come with Whiteness it is important to unpack the variables that are impacted by having White skin. Those who subscribe to the belief that society is a meritocracy are very likely to believe that variables such as an individual's socio-economic status, where a person lives or, the level of education that a person has attained are completely unrelated to skin colour. Yet, in reality, each of those dynamics are heavily impacted by one's race. So along with my middle class socio-economic status, the fact that during the course of this research I was living in St. Catharines, Ontario interlocks with the reality that I am constructed as culturally different from those who inform my research. The benefits I have experienced as a white-skinned male are very real, though they are often unquestioned and remain an unearned set of advantages.

Conversely, the challenges posed by my Whiteness and other facets of my social identity were somewhat alleviated by some commonalities (or shared capital) that allowed me to connect with some of the people who informed my research. Some of the characteristics that made it easier for me to connect with the participants included my being: young, male, athletic, knowledgeable about sports and from Toronto.

Still, the contrast between the privilege afforded to me because of my Whiteness and the oppressive forces which act upon some of my participants because of their Blackness, as well as the conflation of the factors identified above contributed to challenges that were revealed at different stages during the course of my research. Some of the challenges that I faced included: gaining access to the community of Rexdale,

finding community members to participate in my research, developing a rapport with the participants and, most importantly, privileging the participants' data without removing their voices or distorting the meaning of their words. As already established my Whiteness can be understood as the root cause for these challenges.

While it is necessary to reflect upon the intersection of my social identity and the significant impact it had upon my research it is also important to reflect upon the writing process. Plenty of thought and consideration went into how this research would be written as I understood that even excellent research can be meaningless if the writing that serves as its means of dissemination fails to do it justice. In particular, I was very cognizant of the dangers of "expertification" throughout my writing process. Kvale and Brinkmann (2008) the term as follows:

Interview research involves the danger of an "expertification" of meanings where the interviewer as "the great interpreter" expropriates the meanings from the subjects' lived world and reifies them into his or her theoretical schemes as expressions of some more basic reality (p. 218).

I did my best to avoid "expertification" yet it is inevitable that my writing would, at least in part, be a reflection of my thoughts and experiences. As I hope was evident throughout this thesis and, particularly in the following chapter, I made every effort to privilege the words of the participants.

My Whiteness and other facets of my social identity enabled me to conduct this research and affected who I was able to get to participate, how the participants interacted with me and, ultimately, how the research was written. Yet I would be remiss to only

reflect on the impact that my social identity had on this research. This research has also had a great impact on my life and, in a more permanent and lasting sense, me as a person.

There is a lot that I could write about the tremendous impacts this research has had on me and my life however, in the interest of space, I have chosen to focus on one aspect of my life for which my research has been most impactful. As I worked through the final stages of writing this thesis I began my career as a teacher.

This research has afforded me a much more complete idea of Black students' experiences as they navigate Ontario's education system. I now have a better understanding of the impact that implicit racism and other insidious forms of discrimination may have on students both inside and outside of school. This research has also reinforced and reminded me of the importance of physical education and organized extra-curricular sport in the lives of students. Lastly, the context within which education occurs as part of greater society reminds me that offering education that is equitable and free of racism (as well as other forms of discrimination) and oppression requires great strength, a critical perspective and an abundance of support.

### **Chapter 4: Life in Rexdale for Racialized Male Youth**

The first part of this chapter discusses the youths' experiences of racism in their community. These experiences are introduced to highlight the ways in which racism permeates the lives of Rexdale's racialized male youth, especially its Black male youth. The second section examines the youths' views of and experiences within their community, and the third section focuses on the youths' interactions with police. I have made every effort to give precedence to the data obtained from the youth while strategically incorporating data from community leaders to make the analysis more layered and complex.

#### **Racism 2.0**

One thing that was made plainly clear during the course of this research was the fact that privilege and oppression are directly correlated to the social identities of the people living in Rexdale. In examining identity and its many intersections it is important to remain cognizant of its malleability. Perhaps identity is best defined by Stuart Hall who wrote 'identity is not already "there": rather, it is a production, emergent, in process' (as cited in van Ingen & Halas, 2006, p. 391).

Similar to identity, discourses are also emergent and capable of adjustment. As the participants depicted the social discourses that affect the lives of Rexdale's racialized male youth it became evident that the discourses are saturated with racism. Yet the degree of permanence with which participants described racism highlighted its resiliency within Canadian society. This sentiment was maybe best articulated by Gary who said: "I think in terms of racism, when you talk about racism, there's always racism hidden in the system, right?"

Although the experience of racism was something that was thoroughly discussed a lack of experiences of racism was something articulated initially by some of the participants. In response to the question “have you ever experienced racism outside of sport?” some of the participants indicated that they had not:

**Param:** I haven’t necessarily experienced racism on myself.

**Gullede:** Nope, I never experienced racism in my life.

**Sohaib:** Never.

Hylton (2010) suggests that one should be “suspicious of parts of any society that claim to be accessible and fair across racial and ethnic divide” (p. 336). Just as Hylton is suspicious of societies that claim to be equitable, I was suspicious of my participants’ claims that racism was absent from their lives. In part, my suspicions reflected the racial divide that was present in our own research interaction as my Whiteness and White privilege was visible and most likely played a role in shaping the participants’ initial responses. However, as the interviews continued each of these participants described personal experiences of racism.

Yet, even amongst the assertions of racism, some participants’ responses were more detailed while others were quite vague. For instance, when asked about personal experiences of racism outside of sport, Inder replied: “outside of sport I think racism occurs every day. To me personally I’m pretty sure it has occurred but I just can’t remember right now.” This response perfectly encapsulates what Wise (2009) defines as “Racism 2.0” and what Henry and Tator (2009) define as “Democratic Racism.” What these terms describe is a nuanced form of racism which can be difficult to detect and

discuss in contrast to explicit bigotry which is more easily identifiable and commonly understood.

It is this brand of racism that participants described most often when recounting their personal experiences of racism. John's response to my question "have you guys had any experiences of racism outside of sport?" serves as a prime example:

**John:** I worked at a hotel and just because I was Black he [John's supervisor] thinks I was a dirty person, he thinks I didn't do things clean, I didn't sanitize myself. Ya, he thinks I didn't clean the area properly, that I wouldn't use a proper sanitized knife or cause I was Black he thinks I was dirty and all that. So he wouldn't serve my food, he would make me do it over and over again until I did it 100% even though I was ok with it he just wouldn't wanna serve my food. So he just made me keep doing it over. He'd serve his own food and by the time I was really done my food, he wouldn't serve it at all.

In the above excerpt from our interview John's use of the word "thinks" is noteworthy. The fact that his supervisor did not verbally express what John knew he was thinking makes John's experience of racism no less real. However, this brand of racism is much more difficult to prove and address precisely because it was not articulated. In essence that is the power of "Racism 2.0/Democratic Racism." Henry and Tator (2009) allude to the convoluted nature of the problem that this insidious form of racism poses within the context of Canadian society, "The complex, interactive nature of Canadian structures and systems means that no single institutional response, policy, program, or other type of intervention can ensure that racism will be eliminated or even reduced" (p. 366).



One of the ways that racism operates is in the creation and maintenance of stereotypes. The effects that stereotyping has can be separated into two camps. Stereotypes impact how others perceive the stereotyped group and they impact how the stereotyped group perceives themselves. In the interview excerpts below Xalimo and Gary provided some insight as to the stereotypes that affect how others perceive Rexdale's male youth:

**Dan:** "Do you feel that male youth from Rexdale are stereotyped in any particular ways?"

**Xalimo:** 100%. I feel like they're stereotyped as being criminals. They're also stereotyped as having low literacy rates; they're only good at sports. I feel like a lot of people are scared of them.

**Dan:** Are there any stereotypes that are specific to Rexdale that you find the youth from Rexdale are specifically experiencing?

**Gary:** ...you understand that when you're from Rexdale you're considered to be a tough guy, you're considered to be a gang associate and you're considered to be a youth that walks with a gun or has a gun or has access to a gun, right? And so I think that is what the issue is: the issue is that these youths are LABELLED as gang members.

Yet, it is important to acknowledge that Xalimo and Gary are not referring to all of Rexdale's male youth in the above excerpts. They are referring specifically to the community's Black male youth. As is clearly demonstrated in the forthcoming excerpts the difference between the ways in which South Asian male youth and Black male youth from Rexdale are stereotyped is quite pronounced. While the disparity between the

natures of the stereotypes communicated is obvious, the length of the male youth participants' responses to the question of how they are stereotyped is also telling. Quite simply there was less to write about the ways in which South Asian male youth from Rexdale are stereotyped because the South Asian participants did not identify as many stereotypes about themselves as the Black participants identified about their selves.

As a rule participants described South Asian youth stereotypes that were positive. For instance, Karamjeet suggested that his peers believe he will always do "something good" because he is Brown<sup>6</sup>. He elaborates:

**Dan:** Have you ever experienced racism outside of sport?

**Karamjeet:** So outside of sports it's basically like a stereotype, not really racism but, it's not that bad. It's like they think that I should do something good, just cause my skin colour and that's it.

**Dan:** What do you mean by something good? Like...

**Karamjeet:** So they think that I'll be smart or I will study all day instead of playing sports and other things.

As a Black male John was also aware of the ways in which Brown youth are stereotyped. In the interview excerpt below he alludes to the same stereotype to which Karamjeet referred, stating definitively that Brown people and Asians are "smart."

**Dan:** You were talking about in sports, say basketball, football there being more Black guys playing those sports; hockey, baseball more White guys. Do you feel grouped according to race in other parts of life? Like

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<sup>6</sup> The adjective "Brown" was used by participants as a way of racially identifying people of South Asian descent. As to whether or not the word is used colloquially to refer to people who have ethnic backgrounds external to South Asia I am not certain.

outside of sport does that happen at school or with friends or anything like that?

**John:** Ya sometimes actually it does happen [especially] if your school's like a multicultural school, like the school we go to in our area. There's like different types of people that hang out with different types of cultures. So there'll always be the type of Black kids that will be known as the bad people that always stick together and then you have the Whites [who] hang around mostly people that are really good and then you have the Browns and the Asians that hang out with their own gangs and cause they're smart only these types of people can hang out with them but, if a Black person tries to hang out with an Asian person they wouldn't fit in cause they would judge us by our skin tone, skin colour saying that we're not as smart as them so they would just discriminate sometimes.

While it is integral to remain cognizant of the facts that all stereotypes essentialize the experience of the group in question and that prejudice is inherent in the act of stereotyping there are much worse stereotypes in existence than the ones articulated about Brown youth. These stereotypes likely manifest from a discourse that positions certain ethno-racial groups as “model minorities”; the educational and occupational success of such groups are frequently highlighted as validation of Canada's perceived meritocratic opportunity structure (Pon, 2000). Though Canadian scholar Gordon Pon (2000) has focused on the characterization of Chinese-Canadians as “model minorities,” the concept is still useful when considering the ways in which Brown male youth are framed in Rexdale. For instance, John's description of the way in which Black youth are

stereotyped is starkly contrasted by his depiction of the way Brown youth are stereotyped in the excerpt above.

The other Black participants expanded upon John's description of Black youth being stereotyped as "bad people," demonstrating a very clear and thorough understanding of the numerous ways in which racist discourses impact their lives. As a Black female adult Xalimo was also very aware of the ways in which Black male youth are stereotyped. She suggested that Blacks are taught that they are unintelligent or not suited for academic work. She also very poignantly contextualized Black stereotypes as historically established:

**Xalimo:** Black youths, when it comes to racism, are taught that they're only good for trades or manual labour. There is a stereotype, and I feel it goes back to slavery, where Black youths' [are thought] only to be good at physical things. They're not taught that they can actually do something with their brains which is not true at all cause there's a lot of smart Black people but, then they're not taught that.

As Xalimo explains in the above quote from our interview, the way in which Blacks are stereotyped as possessing limited intellectual capabilities serves the racist assumption that Blacks are best suited to manual labour. Xalimo's understanding mirrors the work of critical race theorists. For instance Mensah (2010) argues that, in general, Black Canadians occupy the bottom of Canada's economic hierarchy. He wrote: "few analysts, if any, will disagree that Blacks generally constitute a large part of Canada's proletariat" (p. 145). Furthermore, he urges us to recognize that the birth of the rigid racial stereotypes that cause the economic oppression of Blacks in Canada are not necessarily

borne out of American history. He reminds us of the oft-ignored historical fact that Blacks were also enslaved in Canada.

Yet the historically based stereotype which dictates that Blacks are only suited for manual labour is but one stereotype among a list of those which affect Rexdale's Black male youth today. Another resilient stereotype that Rexdale's Black male youth are constantly challenged to overcome is that of deviance and/or violence. John described the existence of one such restrictive binary which limits Black male youth below:

**Dan:** How are young Black males shown in the media?

**John:** Either we're really good at a sport and we are successful in it or we're really bad; doing violent and trouble[some] things that always bring attention to the world, thinking that we're bad and we're the worst kind of culture that always does the worst things and we're always judged by that kind of stuff.

His powerful words create a very grim picture which at once encapsulates the low expectations of and scant possibilities for Canadian Black male youth. His words also find plenty of theoretical support in the writings of Stuart Hall. Hall argues that Blacks regularly suffer the effects of a "binary form of representation" (1991, p. 229). Referring to Blacks, he delineates: "They seem to be represented through sharply opposed, polarized, binary extremes – good/bad, civilized/primitive, ugly/excessively attractive, repelling-because-different/compelling-because-strange-and-exotic. And they are often required to be both things at the same time!" (Hall, 1991, p. 229).

Yet, assumed low-intelligence, deviance and violence present only some of the negative expectations that contribute to the way in which Black male youth from Rexdale

are stereotyped. Furthermore, it is important to understand that this complicated stereotype is just a part of a greater form of oppression. When combined with other products of racism such as neighbourhood stigmatization its effects are even more devastating. Having been asked to explain whether or not stereotypes about Black males affect him and his friends John described how stigmatization can supplement stereotyping to cause heightened discrimination:

**John:** Ya I think so cause say if I was tryin' out for a ball team and it was in a good area that everything's really good and no real incidents happen and then they see me and, they don't judge me by it but, just because I'm Black, they judge where I come from and most Black people from where I am, like Rexdale for example, they only do bad things. He would just judge me on that, thinking that if I would do that in my area maybe if I come to practice with his team I might bring the trouble to his area.

In the above quote from our interview John articulates an astute awareness of the conflation of stereotypes and stigma. He refers to the way in which the stereotypes associated with Blackness can combine with the stigmatization of a Black youth's community to signal danger or trouble in the minds of a (White or, at least, non-Black) outsider.

While the neighbourhood that a Black male comes from can exacerbate the racism he faces so too can the other elements of his social identity. During the course of this research it became very evident that Somali male youth from Rexdale experience brands of prejudice and oppression that are distinct from the community's other Black male

youth. The variety of prejudicial experiences amongst the Black males interviewed underlines the fact that Blackness is not homogenous.

This important reality was maybe best articulated by Xalimo in the following excerpt from our interview:

**Dan:** Do you think that in Rexdale the Somali male youth, their experiences – whether that be just in the community or in education specifically or in dealings with police – do you think that their experiences are unique to the rest of the community?

**Xalimo:** I feel like every ethnicity, their experiences are unique within their community because your experiences are not just based on where you grow up but also the cultural, religious – those different spheres of life affect who you are. So I would say that a Jamaican kid growing up [in] Jamestown [and] a Somalian kid in Jamestown, they'll have similar experiences because they grew up in Jamestown but, then they'll also have different experiences because of their culture and religion.

Her words once again reinforce the relevance of identity politics in the lives of racialized male youth living in Rexdale. She also reminds us that cultural differences can certainly influence the ways in which Canadian society interacts with racialized male youth in general.

However, more specifically, as Xalimo alluded to in the above excerpt and as this research plainly revealed, religious differences between Black male youth manifest in significant disparities between the ways in which Canadian society interacts with the youth. In *“Cashberta:” Migration Experiences of Somali-Canadian Second Generation*

*Youth in Canada*, York University graduate student Sagal Jibril (2011) succinctly summarized the ways in which Islamic faith impacts the lives of male Canadians of Somali descent. She wrote: “being Muslim appears to pose as an additional challenge for Somali male youth” (Jibril, 2011, p. 16). Therefore, a Somali male youth from Rexdale will very likely face prejudice for being Muslim in addition to the racism he faces for being Black and the stigmatization he faces for living in Rexdale.

Xalimo suggests that one reason a Somali male youth and a non-Somali Black male youth face distinct forms of prejudice is society’s linking of Islamic faith and/or Somali ethnic background with criminality. She said:

In actuality, [if] you look at how many people commit criminal activity [who are] Muslim, it’s so much less than the population of Muslims out there. But I feel like what hasn’t been portrayed is actual facts – when the media’s portraying things – stop saying “a Somalian boy did this or a Muslim.” Like even the video<sup>7</sup>, they didn’t say a youth found the video they said a Somalian found the video – who was innocent. So now you have all this attention on the Somalian community, or somebody commits a crime, they always say a BLACK youth but, if it’s a White person, they don’t say nothing.

The media’s connecting of Somali ethnic background and/or Islamic faith with deviance and/or criminality accomplishes three objectives. First, it works to position Canadians of Somali descent as unauthentic Canadians. Second, it helps Canada to defer responsibility for the grossly inordinate number of violent deaths suffered by Somali-Canadians in

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<sup>7</sup> Here Xalimo refers to the infamous and elusive video that allegedly showed Toronto’s Mayor Rob Ford smoking crack-cocaine.



Alberta and to a lesser extent Ontario (specifically Toronto) in recent years (Jibril, 2011).

Third, it aids in the media's construction of criminal behaviour and even terrorism as characteristics of Islamic faith (Henry & Tator, 2009). Unfortunately, the stereotypical images constructed by the mainstream media have considerable strength and resilience.

Yet, as Xalimo very insightfully stated, Somali-Canadians are not the first group to suffer from a decidedly negative Canadian social discourse:

**Xalimo:** Right now there's a lot of negative stigma about Somali communities... I feel like before it was the Jamaicans that were stigmatized and stereotyped and now I feel like it's the Somalis' time. I feel like every race went through it, the Chinese went through it, the Indians went through it, the Italians went through it and now it's the Somalis because we're the newest immigrant group within Canada.

In 2008 Canadian scholar Ifeanyi Ezeonu highlighted the Toronto media's efforts to stigmatize Jamaican culture and subsequently cite it as a source of blame for Toronto's gun violence – which it was commonly argued was predominantly perpetrated by Jamaican-Canadians. Ezeonu (2008) contends that the media depicted Jamaican-Canadians' supposedly violent culture as developed in Jamaica and then brought over to Canada.

Given the substantial turmoil that Somalia has experienced, particularly over the last 25 years, it is not unreasonable to suggest that Somali-Canadian immigrants have become the new targets for the same media stereotyping. The media points to the beginning of Somalia's civil war and the chaos that ensued as cause for both anti-social behaviour among Somali-Canadian male youth as well as the violence that has afflicted

various Somali-Canadian communities. For male Somali-Canadians living in Rexdale this characterization only intensifies their marginalization and the scrutiny under which police watch them.

### **The Community of Rexdale**

Over the course of this research the participants proved to be not only very insightful in regards to their community but also very perceptive as to how outsiders view Rexdale. One particular view that a number of the participants shared was that Rexdale is a multi-cultural community. More specifically, in their descriptions of the demographics of the three different high schools they attended in Rexdale John, Xalimo and Jamal each suggested that Rexdale is predominantly Black (including a large Somali-Canadian population) and South Asian. These reflections are significant when considered alongside the research of Novac et al. (2002) who noted that, in Canada, Blacks experience the most housing discrimination followed by South Asians. This indicates that Black and South Asian male youth from Rexdale are among a group of Canadians who have been geographically marginalized according to ethno-racial characteristics.

During my interview with Gary he drew comparison between Rexdale and some of Toronto's other priority communities. He explained that like other priority communities Rexdale faces systemic barriers such as poverty, violence and gang involvement. Yet, among the priority communities he characterized Rexdale as distinct and encapsulated the seriousness of the issues the community is dealing with when he said: "Rexdale has been the hottest community for the last three summers in a row in terms of gang violence and shootings."

It is very important to recognize the severity of the degree to which Rexdale is affected by the systemic barriers to which Gary alluded above. Furthermore, in examining the community more closely it is integral to remain cognizant of the great influence that it has on the racialized male youth who call it home. James (2012a) summarized the role that communities have in shaping the lives of their members as follows: “The fact is, we are all products of the communities or neighbourhoods in which we live and grew up, and people judge us by what we know – or think they know – about them” (p. 16).

As a “product” of Rexdale, Param depicted his community as a positive space. He said:

I don't really hear a lot of bad stuff about it. I guess cause most of the new people who come to Canada come to this area because it's a good area I believe. You know that's where people start off, it's a nice community and there's a lot of things nearby.

While Param's account of Rexdale is important as it provides a first-hand counterstory to the hegemonic, predominantly negative one propagated by the media, the fact that it is a viewpoint held by one of the South Asian participants is noteworthy. This particular youth attended high school outside of Rexdale and expressed having no negative experiences with the police. While the Black male youth who were interviewed also provided a viewpoint of Rexdale that was different from the narrow, oversimplified one espoused by the media they did not express opinions nearly as positive as that of Param's. This is a result of the fact that the ways in which Rexdale's Black male youth experience

their community space differs greatly from the ways South Asian male youth experience that same space.

However, while they may experience Rexdale differently than their Black peers the South Asian participants were still able to articulate the stigma that Rexdale carries. Karamjeet demonstrated his understanding of the stigma that is affixed to Rexdale in the following excerpt from the first focus group:

So some of my friends, they move away from Rexdale, they think of it as a bad area cause they might have moved to a better area I guess and they look back to it like it's a bad area and you shouldn't live there and stuff like that.

However, having lived in Rexdale for many years Jamal suggested that the community is not really as bad as the stigma suggests it is.

**Dan:** Is there kind of a stereotype specific to Rexdale in general like...

**Jamal:** Obviously Rexdale has its stereotypes. You can ask somebody on Bay Street: "what's Rexdale?" and they're like "oh there's a shooting everyday there. They're just gangsters." Right? Just like if you say Malvern, Jane and Finch, you know? And those stereotypes are, it's a – I don't know. I don't know what to say about them. Maybe they're – I can't say "oh no you can't say that." Yes there are shootings here. Yes crime is a little bit higher than other places but, that's not it. It might be wild to you but you know, you live in the community, it's not as bad as the media or people portray it as.

In writing about the community of Brixton, a community in England that carries a stigma similar to that of Rexdale, Caroline Howarth (2002) described the ways in which marginalization and stigmatization affect how adolescents from the community view themselves:

How others recognize us has an impact on how we recognize ourselves.

This is particularly true for the adolescent. It is at this time that 'the problematic relationship between how we see ourselves and how others see us, becomes a central concern' (Jenkins, 1996: 67). For those from marginalized and stigmatized communities, the gaze of the other is all the more inescapable (p. 240).

Yet the gaze of the other is even more inescapable for the members of that marginalized and stigmatized community who are also stereotyped. When Rexdale is stigmatized as being impoverished, gang occupied and a place with an exorbitant crime rate it is the stereotypes affixed to the community's Black male youth that are intensified. It is the lives of these residents in particular that suffer the most damage as a function of Rexdale's stigmatization.

However, in addition to being a stigmatized community, Rexdale is also, in some ways, a divided community. Jamal alluded to this division when he recounted some of the concerns voiced by community members when he told them he was starting a men's basketball league in Rexdale. He then described the importance of the league in regards to fostering healthy relationships amongst males in the community:

A lot of the older guys, from different cultures too, I had some African guys, Nigerian guys, Jamaican guys, they were all different – they were

telling me “hey, do you know what you’re doing here? Are you really gonna start a league here? In the heart of Rexdale? With Mount Olive right here and you’re gonna want Jamestown kids... and then the Dixon kids to come... Are you crazy?!”... I said “relax.” Me growing up it was like that. I know obviously there could be those problems. I’m ready to deal with them cause I know a lot of the kids. Thank God we finished it yesterday and we didn’t even have an incident. Not only did we not have an incident but now there’s some of the guys that are from different neighbourhoods that know each other. Which is for me I think the best thing that comes out of it because eventually it can potentially save a dispute between two people who don’t even know each other and will dispute for no particular reason other than they’re from two different neighbourhoods.

The demarcation of spaces within the Rexdale community has very tangible implications for some of its racialized male youth. Gary provided insights as to how community space can simply be inaccessible to certain members of the community:

**Gary:** We have the Community Hub but, I mean again, it’s not everybody that can get into the Community Hub and just the location where the Community Hub is, it’s not safe for other youths that’s in the community, that will not travel to where it’s located.

His words allude to the potential repercussions of stepping into a different neighbourhood in Rexdale for some of the community’s Black male youth.

It is important to note that the existence of animosity between Rexdale's different neighbourhoods expressed in the above excerpts was a sentiment that was absent from Carl James' *Life at the intersection: Community, class and schooling*. However, some of the research presented in the book – which focuses on Toronto's Jane and Finch community – did suggest that residents identified more strongly with their own neighbourhood than with their community as a whole (James, 2012a).

Yet, the division of Rexdale according to its neighbourhoods was not the only type of division that the participants described. John suggested that the community is also separated along racial lines. Xalimo and Jamal were in agreement with John, suggesting that divisions occur along ethnic lines as well. For instance, Xalimo believed that in Rexdale Somali boys only hang out with other Somali boys. She felt that, as a rule, people generally start to gravitate towards others of the same race and/or ethnicity as they get older. This is an indication of what Ali (2008) argues: that racialized, second-generation Canadian youth start to realize that multi-culturalism is merely an ideal as they reach adulthood. He attributes this realization to the resistance the youth experience as they begin to venture beyond their multicultural communities (Ali, 2008). Interestingly, a discussion of this form of ethnic divide was also absent from James' examination of Jane and Finch in *Life at the intersection*.

While the policing of Rexdale's space is in part enforced by members of the community another group that has tremendous influence on the community's spatial boundaries is, not surprisingly, the police. Gullede recounted a story that illustrated this reality during the course of our focus group.

**Gullede:** I remember there was this time, me and my friends, when it was lunch break for us we used to go to a place, get our lunch and we'd just sit there, it was outside, near a building... there was people complaining that we were just – the reason why we were there – I don't know, we weren't doing anything, we were just sitting there cause –

**Dan:** Sorry, who are these people?

**Gullede:** We were beside a bingo place, you know? ...this bingo building was not even close to us. It was like, we were at the end of the building and they were kind of in the middle and they used to – they complained to the police saying that we were – it was a bunch of old, you know I'm not gonna be racist here, but a bunch of old White people.

**Dan:** That's fine, go ahead.

**Gullede:** They were just always complaining that "oh these Black kids are always here," and they just, I don't know and then, there was a day that we weren't there, and then a couple girls, they were walking past there and the police officers told them to tell us that if we came back there, that they'll beat us up and shit.

**Dan:** The police officers told the girls?

**Gullede:** Ya, that if we come back to our place where we sat down, they'd beat us up.

Xalimo was also cognizant of the ways in which Black males are prevented from accessing community space in Rexdale. She summarized the spatial restrictions imposed on Black males in the following excerpt from our interview:



...when I spoke to the students in our GED, like before they used to chill in the block, now they don't. So now one of them was saying to me they go downtown because there's no [laws against] loitering downtown, you can loaf downtown, you can stand there all day and do what you want but, here if you stand and post up anywhere you'll get arrested, like "what are you doing here?" ...but if, I could do that for hours and nobody would say anything to me but being a Black [male] youth, no... Cause if you look, a lot of the Black youths, I don't know why but, they like to post-up. You'll see them in the plaza strip posting up or Albion Mall posting, and it's fixed locations where everybody stands but now the cops will bother you like "what are you doing here?" So now a lot of them will travel downtown.

In the excerpts above both Gullede and Xalimo describe the resistance Black residents of Rexdale face when trying to access community space. Jibril (2011) contextualizes this resistance as a reality that has long been a part of the Rexdale community: "Somali families who were living in the Dixon area in the late 1980's faced xenophobia from the Dixon Corporation homeowners" (p. 24). Sadly, Black male youth from Rexdale still evidently experience a form of spatial segregation even roughly 25 years later.

### **Policing in Rexdale**

To serve and protect is the motto of the Toronto Police Service. It represents a goal, something for all employees of the TPS to strive to fulfill. Sadly, for many of Rexdale's Black male youth the words represent a promise broken while also serving as a

reminder of the trust that is maybe irreparably destroyed. In fact, as I found out during the course of my research, gaining a better understanding of the complex relationship between Rexdale's Black male youth and the Toronto police is key to understanding how the youth experience their community in general.

What was frustrating about hearing the Black male participants recount so many stories of police mistreatment was hearing them describe the police's potential for having a positive influence on the community. Sohaib, Gullede and Mahad each believed that police – even White police – could be fair. In supporting this viewpoint they explained that there are cops who contribute positively to the community by helping out with programs such as the Somali Men's Basketball League. In fact, Jamal noted that the police funded the league. He suggested that their involvement can go a long way towards making positive connections in the community.

While some of the Black participants did describe the potential for police to help foster healthy community development a couple of the South Asian participants went even further. They described actually feeling safer in the presence of police:

**Karamjeet:** So I have seen police but I feel – I don't think it's a bad thing cause I feel more safer and so like walking down the street I feel more safer if I see a police car. So I'm not scared that much.

**Param:** I don't feel as if I'm being watched I just feel safer around here because then – like you know there's some areas in Rexdale which are bad and some which are very good so I guess when I'm passing through the bad areas I guess it's nice to see a police car around. You feel a lot safer.

However, the above excerpts from the first focus group are to be read with the critical understanding that the policing of bodies is not standardized. As the following excerpts clearly demonstrate the views expressed by the Black participants are extremely different than those of the South Asian participants.

**Mahad:** That's the problem.

**Dan:** Like you mean no one...

**Mahad:** ...will come forth and say "hey what you guys are doing is wrong." They'll scream at the cops, scream at the cops, scream at the cops, soon as the cops leave it's gonna be the story of the weekend and it's done.

**Gullede:** It's not that we don't do anything, it's that we can't because at the end of the day we're gonna be wrong. If you – who would anybody listen to? A bunch of kids from an area that's not well-liked or police officers? Like, you know? It's not a winning situation.

**Sohaib:** And the parents are – they're afraid of...

**Mahad:** Ya.

**Sohaib:** ...going forth to the police.

An imbalance in power between police and Rexdale's Black male youth was a common theme in many of the stories told. In the excerpt from the third focus group below Mahad describes a personal interaction with the police which clearly illustrates this imbalance in power.

**Mahad:** Ya there was a time where, I was at my building and then there were cops that just came into my building. They stopped me, they pulled

me over, they said – they started talking to me. They started asking me about “what’s going on in your neighbourhood, do you feel safe,” and stuff like that. So I thought they wanted to help. So then they started to – they put me into their car, they were talking to me more and they said “listen we need you to tell us [what’s] going on, who’s the heads of everything,” and stuff like that, the drug game and all that. I said “listen I’m not a part of any of this.” They said “listen if you don’t answer us or you don’t tell us someone we’re gonna write a ticket for you, banning you from this building.” I said “I live in this building. How you gonna ban me from a building?” They were threatening me sorta, you know and they were putting me into a tight corner and then when they seen that I wouldn’t budge they left me. They said “ok go home,” and then every time now I see those cops they always pull me over and they try and talk to me, stuff like that and, I always have to talk to them. I can’t deny and I can’t leave them or else, you know, I’m gonna get crushed.

The imbalance in power to which Mahad referred above begins with the intensified and discriminatory level of police surveillance that Black males are forced to endure in spaces throughout Toronto. In the excerpt below Jamal describes the stress that manifests in Black males as a result of constant police surveillance. He goes on to explain the strategy he uses to deal with police when they are exercising the substantial power they hold over him.

**Dan:** Maybe can you talk a little bit about that surveillance or – you know, is that a cause of stress within the community, feeling like you’re always being watched or that there’s always police?

**Jamal:** There is a stress. Me as a grown man right now, if I am stopped by the police I know how to conduct myself cause I’m a little bit more educated now. I know my rights, I know what they can do, what they can’t do but, even then because I know my rights doesn’t mean I’m gonna say “hey you can’t ask me this, you can’t...” I’m gonna co-operate up until – so they can just leave me alone. Even if it’s illegal for them to do. Cause I know I’m clean. So I’m saying let them do whatever the hell they want and let me walk away. Let me let them infringe on my rights and get it over with now instead of having to deal with it in the court system.

The fact that Jamal is hesitant to insist his rights as a Canadian citizen be upheld emphasizes the disparity in power between Rexdale’s police and its Black males. Henry and Tator (2009) would suggest that this relationship will always be weak and tumultuous as “the police are the most visible embodiment of the dominating group’s power” (p. 152). This problem can be exacerbated by the fact that the police frequently provide the media with information that supports their agendas (Ezeonu, 2008). This can lead to people outside of Rexdale siding with the police instead of supporting and/or empathizing with the victims of police surveillance and racialized criminalization.

Of everything that the participants in this research project discussed it was racial profiling (not schooling or sport) which generated the most conversation. During my time in Rexdale it was quickly apparent that the police are extremely prevalent in the

community. It was not uncommon for me to see four or five police cars during the course of a short visit to Rexdale. There are more police patrolling Rexdale than there are patrolling the area of Toronto that I grew up in and there are certainly more police patrolling Rexdale than there are in the St. Catharines, Ontario community where I went to school. It is this excessive police surveillance and a disparity in power that create the conditions necessary for discriminatory acts such as racial profiling. The discrimination that the Black male youth of Rexdale suffer at the hands of police is so rampant and so blatant that Inder, Karamjeet and Param, who are of South Asian descent, each expressed full awareness of its prevalence.

**Dan:** Do you guys think that there's a difference between how people feel when they see police and their own identity?

**Inder:** Ok I think it depends on who you are because there is racism so the police might be like not the whole cause but a part of it. So I think also if you're Black or White like the police might view you differently and because of that you might view them...

**Karamjeet:** I think it depends on the experience of the person. If they've had a bad experience with the police then they're scared of them and they usually don't like waiting around them. If they had never experienced the police – like me and some of my friends – they don't really care about them, they just feel a lot safer around police.

**Param:** Sometimes I think it depends on skin colour [when it comes to] how you feel because some policemen in this area are very racist and they like to pull over Black guys just to check them out, even if they have done

nothing wrong. They're just suspicious of them and let's say in my opinion I am, I mean like I am Brown but, like in my opinion I'm not really scared of the cops because I have no bad experiences with them. Like I remember I was about to get robbed and the police pulled over and stopped it. So I have a good experience with them but some people might not have a good experience with them and for them it might not be that pleasant seeing cops all around.

Although they expressed an awareness of the existence of racial profiling the South Asian participants' perceptions of (and lack of interaction with) the police was starkly contrasted by the many discriminatory experiences articulated by the Black participants. It is critically important to reiterate the fact that racial profiling is an infringement on the rights of Canadian citizens. In total, the Black participants shared eight stories of racial profiling and/or harassment. Unfortunately, in the interest of space I had to be quite discerning in my selection of data that would be included herein.

**Dan:** As guys from Rexdale do you ever feel as if you're being stereotyped by anyone?

**Sohaib:** Oh my god. Police – facts.

**Gullede:** Police.

**Mahad:** Police.

John said that even when Black males like himself are not being stopped by police, they are still being watched. Gary also believes that Rexdale's Black male youth are racially profiled and harassed. Abdel-Shehid (2005) argues that racial profiling is part of a concerted effort to marginalize Blackness (and especially Black masculinity) by

permanently linking it to criminality. He suggests that the all-to-common practice of identifying Canada's Black males as, say, "Jamaican-Canadian" or even just "Jamaican" is part of this same racist process of marginalization and denial of Canadian identity (Abdel-Shehid, 2005).

In the excerpt from our interview below Jamal discusses how racial profiling occurs and why it will be a difficult issue to resolve:

**Jamal:** So I would say that surveillance issue and, and the whole police giving them a hard time, it's there and it'll never go away. Never.

**Dan:** Cause that was your experience growing up as well.

**Jamal:** Exactly. Until they get some people, until the police force reflects the communities that they serve it will always be like that. Until it reflects the community that they serve – cause there's people that are of the same people and understand the cultures and what certain things are, they'll understand, they'll know how to deal with it... Whereas if it's some guy that lives all the way out in Barrie that's policing me – what the hell do you know? We come from two different worlds.

As one would expect, increased surveillance has been found to result in an increased number of arrests (Mensah, 2010; James, 2012a). James (2012a) refers to this direct correlation as a "self-fulfilling prophecy" (p. 26). In recounting an instance in which he was a victim of racial profiling Sohaib illustrates how this act of discrimination can impact the lives of Black male youth living in Rexdale.

**Sohaib:** Ya one time I was driving with my – my brother was driving and... ah ya he – one Chinese officer pulled us over and after that he asked



us all our names and he went back to his car right and he searched all our names. The only one he couldn't find was me.

**Dan:** This wasn't – sorry to interrupt but – this isn't like speeding or anything?

**Sohaib:** Just pulled over for no reason. Then after that he told me “step out the car,” and without anything he's like “put your hands up,” and so I put 'em up and he started patting me down. I'm like “why are you doing that?” He's like “if you don't be quiet I'm gonna arrest you,” and I'm like “ok.” Then he's like “if you lie to me one more time, I'm gonna take you to jail right now,” and I'm like “how am I lying? This is my name,” and he's like “well you have no I.D. on you?” and I'm like “no,” and then he went back in the car and he gave us a \$250 ticket.

**Mahad:** For what?

**Sohaib:** For no reason! He just made up something...

**Gullede:** Were you speeding?

**Sohaib:** Wallahi we were driving fam.<sup>8</sup>

**Gullede:** Did he just write down speeding?

**Sohaib:** He just wrote down something, I don't know...

According to Wortley, incidents of discrimination like these should not be read with surprise. He states that in Canada “black males are much more vulnerable to police stop and search encounters than black females or men and women from all other racial categories” (2003, p. 104). Smith (2006) provides further context to this overt effort to

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<sup>8</sup>Xalimo explained to me that the Arabic word ‘Wallahi’ means ‘I swear to God’ while the word ‘fam’ is short for ‘family.’

criminalize Blacks by characterizing the practice as a nuanced form of slavery. She writes: “The forms of slavery may change – whether it is through the formal system of slavery, sharecropping, or through the current prison-industrial complex – but the logic itself has remained consistent” (Smith, 2006, p. 67).

However, as John discusses below there are factors that can intensify the racial profiling that a Black male is subjected to.

**Dan:** Just being around, in this area I’ve noticed that there’s more of a police presence then in my area. Do you guys feel that you’re being watched by the police in this area or that there are more police in your area?

**John:** Ya I don’t feel like I’m more watched but I feel like it’s being more safe than sorry cause we do have lots of incidences where people get robbed or in trouble for fighting or stealing and I would understand why they would have a lot of police but, at the same time ya sometimes I feel like I’m trapped, like I can’t do my own business without a cop coming by thinking I’m doing something wrong or, cause of my colour skin they would question me sometimes. Like sometimes when I go to school in the morning I might like, I don’t think it’s wrong to wear my pants a little saggy down but sometimes it does offend other people... Like one time the cop pulled me over and asked me if I did anything crazy or what would I do after school and asked me questions. This is before school started and I’m like “no sir, nothing,” and then he told me to carry on with my day and I’m like “ok.”

**Dan:** So do you feel like it had to do with the way you dressed as well as your skin colour or being a male?

**John:** I think ya, I think it's more the way my presence comes out, like the way I dress and the colour of my skin. Cause if I say there's a group of guys that are White and look perfect but they must've been doing something crazy they won't question them but, then they come to me first.

As previously discussed the conflation of stereotype(s) and stigma can be particularly devastating for Black male youth. In Rexdale a Black male is discriminated against for his race alone but a Black male who dresses in a way deemed threatening by police faces a more intense form of discrimination for the cultural capital exhibited on his Black body.

Conversely, there is a moderating effect that people who are not Black and/or male can have on the stereotypes and stigma affixed to the Black males in their company. Xalimo described this phenomenon and so did John, stating: "when I'm hanging out with my friends that are White or a different culture they [the police] won't really look at me."

As if racial profiling were not bad enough, the inordinate amount of power that police hold in relation to Rexdale's Black male youth mean that they can behave violently towards them with little accountability. In depicting the frequency with which police brutality occurs in Rexdale Sohaib and Gullede had this to say:

**Sohaib:** One guy was just walking and I was walking beside him right and they [the police] grabbed the guy cause he has charges and he's on probation. So they grabbed him and they're like "what are you doing out of your house?" and they stomped on him with steel-toe boots. So the

guy took it cause he's not supposed to be out of his house, that's the thing.

So he's like, might as well get beat up so I don't go to jail, you get it? So that happens in the stairwells, the elevator, the hallways – everywhere.

**Dan:** And it's a lot right?

**Sohaib:** That happens all the time. That happens in my building daily. It's a daily, daily thing, ya.

**Gullede:** Ya you know I see a lot of kids get beat up by cops a lot. It's not a new thing.

Mahad also recounted stories in which violence was inflicted upon Rexdale's Black male youth by police officers. As he and Gullede explained the violence can be brazen because community members have been deterred from trying to hold the offending officers accountable by a justice system that has ignored their reports of police brutality.

**Mahad:** I seen one time they bashed his head outside.

**Dan:** Really?

**Mahad:** Ya. They were chasing him... they were chasing him and then he stopped, he put his hands up, they grabbed his head and bashed it. Bashed it to whatever they can and then they'll just all beat him up, even though he stopped, put himself on the floor and put up his hands –

**Dan:** And this is outside?

**Mahad:** Outside in front of everybody. Beating him, beating him, beating him because no one in Dixon does anything you know? They won't speak up or anything like that.

These stories illustrate just how powerful the police are and simultaneously what little accountability they have. Yet, as Oriola, Neverson and Adeyanju (2012) remind us, police are only both extremely powerful and hardly accountable in the context of communities that are racialized and of a low socio-economic status. Nelson provides an excellent analysis of the way in which police brutality is understood by the part of society that does not have to endure its violence. He states: “the violence inherent in the regulation of racialized space is rendered invisible when law is conceived as being a product of consensus of liberal social values” (Nelson, 2006, p. 252). His words may begin to explain why the calls for an end to police brutality by Rexdale’s community members seem to always fall on deaf ears.

In considering the racism that Rexdale’s Black male youth are forced to suffer from police alone it is easy to understand the efforts some make to leave the community. Xalimo described Black males’ tendencies to leave Rexdale for short periods of time so that they could “post-up” without being bothered. However, she also discussed the tendency for community members to leave Rexdale permanently:

**Xalimo:** ...anybody who is successful in this community, leaves the community. So there’s no successful individuals here cause if you’re successful why would you live in Metro Housing? You wouldn’t. You could go off and do what you have to do and get your own place in the suburbs and start your family and no one comes back.

The desire to get out of Rexdale was also something articulated by both Gullede and Mahad. Gullede wishes to find a job outside the country while Mahad would like to go to university in Alberta.

These Somali-Canadian youth's plans to relocate are consistent with the findings of Jibril's research. When she spoke to the mothers of Somali-Canadian boys who had left Toronto for Alberta they cited "unemployment in Toronto, interaction with police officers and discrimination" (2011, p. 40) as the reasons for their sons' departures.

Furthermore, James (2012a) suggests that marginalized communities can be viewed by residents as impermanent habitats. In his research on Jane and Finch he stated how a certain section of Jane Street is referred to as a "corridor." He explained that the way in which high-rise apartments line this particular area of Jane Street makes people think of a "long, narrow hallway" (James, 2012a, p. 35). James (2012a) explains the corridor metaphor further:

Corridors are spaces that one passes through to get from one place to another – not a space in which to linger, spend time or live... They use the metaphor to depict the community as one in which people are trapped in a narrow space with limited exit routes and hopeless conditions, and with people who engage in antisocial and violent activities (p. 35).

While Rexdale may not look exactly like Jane and Finch in a structural sense, parallels do exist between the two communities in that Rexdale may have a "corridor" of its own. However, there are factors that can prevent Somali male youth or Black male youth in general from leaving Rexdale. In my interview with Xalimo she discussed the gravitational effect that subsidized or low-income housing can have upon an individual (or family):

**Xalimo:** So everybody is stuck in this vicious cycle. Your parents live in Metro Housing, you live in Metro Housing; that's just about it.

James (2012a) supports Xalimo's sentiment, suggesting that wanting to leave a stigmatized, impoverished community may not always be enough. He writes: 'getting out of the 'hood and moving "up" to the suburbs is not without its struggles, especially when its residents' bodies are imbued with particular social and cultural meaning in relation to geography, space or context' (p. 43-44).

In summary, Black male youth from Rexdale live with a paradox. They are not always welcome within their own community but, when they try to escape their oppression and leave a space that does not fully accept them they can be held back by factors such as poverty or criminalization that are rooted in the community they are trying to leave behind.

## **Chapter 5: School and Sport**

This chapter analyzes the experiences of Rexdale's racialized male youth in school and sport. In many cases, schools offer Rexdale's racialized male youth their best opportunities to access sports equipment, recreational facilities and organized sports leagues. As participants explained, sports played an important role in their lives and provide the opportunity to relieve stress and build self-esteem. In particular, the Black participants outlined the importance of school sports as they regularly experience increased levels of stress and lowered self-esteem within the Eurocentric educational environments that they are forced to navigate. These negative outcomes can result in alienation, trauma and ultimately disengagement. The chapter concludes with a focus on participants' experiences within sport in relation to their lives within their community.

### **Education in Rexdale**

Schools have the power to provide students with the opportunity to develop tools with which they can achieve upward social mobility. Yet, in talking with the participants of this research it became clear that this powerful opportunity is being squandered for countless Black male students who are underserved educationally. Gary describes part of the issue below:

**Dan:** You talked a little bit about the education system. From your experience working with the youth, what are the weaknesses of the educational system or, ways in which the education system fails youth specifically from Rexdale and, what are the ways that it is beneficial?

**Gary:** I think again it goes – I can tell you what I hear from the youths. A lot of them say that they're not being engaged in school. The teachers



don't understand them. They're stereotyped, right? They're profiled a lot so you hear that a lot. You hear a lot that teachers don't care and we – especially me as a youth worker – understand that one of the most important tools to working with youths is empathy. If you're not using empathy to work with the youth then you're gonna lose them and I think that's what's happened. The school system has a structure and if you have a youth that's coming from a broken family, there's trauma and those things are not being addressed but they're going to an environment that's hindering or causing more trauma to them it's not gonna work. So that's the issue.

In discussing his own experiences of racism and oppression within school as well as those of his co-workers and the youth he works with Jamal was adamant that racism exists “throughout the board.” Supporting Jamal's assertion, the youth who were interviewed clearly delineated that racism and other forms of prejudice remain key factors in educational experiences that are marred by subjugation.

Though most of the data included in this portion of the chapter was derived from the Somali-Canadian participants it can be safely assumed that they share some of their experiences amongst the greater Black student body in Ontario. For instance, some of the Somali-Canadian participants described being encouraged to take non-academic courses as well as the low expectations that their teachers held for them. These exact same experiences were established by Dei et al. (1997) as factors which contribute to the especially high drop-out rate amongst Black students in Ontario.

For some of the Black males who participated in this research racism seemed to have a constant and inescapable impact on their studies in high school. For instance, Mahad discussed how racism had an immediate influence on his experience of high school.

**Dan:** So we talked about kind of – you were talking a little bit about experiencing racism within sport or at like an athletic context. You guys have experiences of racism outside of sport in...

**Mahad:** Ya! Like for example my guidance counselor in grade nine would tell me “why don’t you switch to applied,” or whatever you know? Just because I’m Somali you know? Just because I’m Somali and I know that they push that a lot on Somali students.

The ramifications of these types of interactions become frightening when one considers the fact that guidance counselors often assist grade eight students in the selection of their courses before they enter high school. This means that decisions influenced by racist discourses can impact students’ high school educations prior to the beginning of their studies. Jamal recounted a story similar to the one Mahad told suggesting the regularity with which this type of racism is experienced by Somali students.

**Dan:** In what ways is the system – whether it be education or whatever – specifically not serving male Somali youth?

**Jamal:** I would say that... like any other race or nation that migrates to Canada – even though we’ve been here for about 20 some odd years – it’s that, like I remember when I was going to high school simple things that’s,

I remember I was switching my classes from Applied to Academic. In my first year I took I think two applied courses and then at that time you could switch them right away, as long as you switched them before grade 10. I wanted to switch it cause you know I seen the difference. It was like a chapter or two and that's the difference of you being able to go to university regardless of your grades, just being able to apply and not being able to apply, right? That was something that was important to my parents. Like me personally I could care less about university at that time – I didn't even wanna go but, that was something that was important to my parents and they enabled, instilled in me that because I was the oldest and I have so much responsibility, the direction you take this family is on your shoulders. So I went in to see the guidance counselor to tell him "hey you know what I'd like to switch my classes," and haha I still laugh at him – I tell a lot of the kids today – and these are some of the things that's wrong with the system. He said to me "why, do you wanna switch? It's easier, for you." As a guidance counselor I'm tryin' to, a youth is tryin' to better themselves or tryin' to challenge themselves, who are you to stop? ...I said listen you're my guidance counselor, you're here to change my schedule, that's it. That term guidance is just a term for me. That's not what you're going to do for me. Change my classes." It's that simple and I think those are the type of things that still exist today, right? Where some of the parents, like if my parents weren't there to be like "you know what? This is what you have to do and I need this and" – some of these kids are going

to do exactly that because it's easier for them now. They're not thinkin' about three years from now "what am I gonna do?"

In *Claiming space: Aboriginal students within school landscapes*, van Ingen and Halas (2006) draw on Mary Louise Pratt's conceptualization of school as a 'contact zone' in which incongruent cultures collide. They argue that this collision almost always results in the prevailing of the dominant White culture while all other cultures are forced into submission at the expense of their educational success. Henry and Tator (2009) built on this notion in stating that the disempowerment that racialized students suffer in school is merely a continuation of the disempowerment they suffer outside of school at the hands of various other social institutions. Lastly, Yosso (2005) suggests that this disempowerment is enabled by the deficit perspective commonly used when evaluating the cultural capital of racialized communities.

Yet, the participants' recounted stories of guidance counselors encouraging them to take non-academic classes was not the only way in which participants described racism being perpetrated against them at school. As John suggested below teachers also generally hold lower expectations of Black students.

**Dan:** ...You were kind of talking about interactions with say police and them expecting different things from different racial groups. Do you feel that that's the same at school, like teachers have different expectations of different racial groups?

**John:** ...everywhere on news they think Black people always do the worst things in the world. So when a teacher goes to school and they see the Black kids just like playing around, talking and going on their phone,

they might not pay attention to them but, then they see like the White or Brown guys in front of the class paying attention, doing extra stuff for work. I think teachers will rather help those students then the students that wouldn't wanna try.

More specifically Jamal described his experiences with a teacher who was himself a practicing Muslim but had very low expectations of his Muslim students – specifically racialized Muslim students. He recounted running into this teacher as a grade 12 student having already had him for Chemistry in grade 11.

**Jamal:** There was this one teacher I had, he was a Chemistry teacher, Muslim guy and, I thought you know he's a Muslim I could – like I always try to look for a common ground with anybody. Whether it be my race, religion, hobbies whatever it be. Like even with you. We'll talk sports, right? Ball finals, stuff like that. Umm and I failed his class, rightfully so. I didn't know what I was doing. I didn't like science. I took grade 11 chemistry cause my father told me to take it. He was my science teacher before too and just some of the things that he said, maybe at that time I wasn't... I knew they were wrong. Like he would – what he was saying might not be wrong but where he was going with it and I would say “stop being so negative, that's not what he means,” because I was scared to defend or, to even say “what do you mean by that?” Then coming out of my grade 12 year now I know what I wanna do and where I wanna go. I was taking Calculus and I remember I seen him in the hallway and he's like “Aaaah ya, so what are you taking?” So I gave him all the courses

and I said “ya I’m taking Calculus,” and he said “Calculus?! You’re taking Calculus?! Do you know that is the hardest course in high school?” I looked at him and I said “you’re a fuckin asshole.” I told him “listen, I’m gonna tell you this,” and he goes “I’m gonna take you to” – “take me wherever you want. I’m gonna tell you this. Not only am I gonna take this class, I’m gonna pass it, I’m gonna go to university and there’s nothing you can do to stop me. So I’m gonna tell you something. If I hear you talking like this to any other student, please believe me I will have the board on your ass. Don’t ever fucking talk to me again. You’re not my teacher, I’m not doing anything wrong, get the hell out of my face.”

Jamal’s story illustrates a racist discourse that is entrenched within Ontario’s education system. The discourse, which many teachers adhere to, states that Black students do not possess the qualities necessary to succeed in academic courses (Dei et al., 1997). Xalimo suggested that while Black students are not deemed to be intellectually capable they are assumed to have a natural proclivity for athletics which results in them doing better in Health and Physical Education than in their other classes.

**Dan:** What significance do race and racism have within the Rexdale community?

**Xalimo:** Significance when it comes to sports or...

**Dan:** You can answer first, if you want, inside sport and then outside of athletics.

**Xalimo:** I feel racism has an impact in all experiences of life depending on your educational career path, your recreational [activities]... I feel like

people don't have high aspirations for Black youth. The youth are taught that they're only successful in the gym and if you look at even the grades the Black youth tend to do better in gym than other sports. I feel like that's a form of racism.

**Dan:** Than other classes?

**Xalimo:** Ya than other classes, sorry. I feel that's a form of racism. Black youth are taught that – you can even see the dynamic if you take a Black youth into gym class they're very confident cause they feel like this is their niche, this is what they're good at. If you put that same youth in a different classroom which is, like maybe biology, they're sitting in the back all quiet and meek. So I feel like Black youths are taught a stereotype: this is where you excel, this is where you don't excel and, I do believe in self-fulfilling prophecies. If you tell a youth they're only good at sports, they're only gonna be good at sports and there is more pressure for Black youths to do better in sports. Like I was shocked to see how strict our coaches were when it came to playing sports, where you get trained in the morning and there's more emphasis. Obviously the child's going to excel if you put this pressure on them but that same emphasis is not placed on them when it comes to teaching. Where it's like "oh you're Black youth, ok you probably didn't get it." So I feel like there is racism within the school system and then that trickles down to us cause we're taught racism and then we believe it in ourselves. So I do see a difference in that.

Xalimo's words are supported by the findings of Dei et al. (1997) as well as James (2005) who wrote:

Canadian studies of Black students indicate that low teacher expectations, the tendency to stream Black students into basic and vocational educational programs, and teachers encouraging them to participate in athletic activities remain a concern for many Black parents (p. 202).

Still, the experiences of educational racism among Black students are not limited to their being encouraged to take applied courses by guidance counselors or the low expectations of their teachers. Educational racism can also quite simply be demonstrated in a dislike of Black students and a refusal to teach them as Gullede articulated in the excerpt from the third focus group below:

I was not really a bad student, just never – there's a couple teachers I had problems with and it was resolved in grade 11. I had a Math teacher for like every day when I came to Math he would just straight up kick me out. I don't know what – like I came, I sat down, he'd tell me "get out." Every day for like two weeks and you know I got angry every time and I said "why are you kicking me out?" He wouldn't answer me and I just snapped, I got angry and I started yelling at him.

Critical race theorists maintain that the processes of subjugation which racialized students are subjected to during their formative years, such as the one described by Gullede in the excerpt above, have very dire implications for their futures. For instance, Dei et al. (1997) as well as James (2005) contend that individuals' educational experiences prepare them for their respective places within society. Therefore, when



Black male students are consistently underserved by Ontario's education system it has a significant effect on their abilities to achieve success and autonomy within Ontario's society.

Still, to suggest that all Black male students from Rexdale interact with Ontario's education system in the same way would be wrong. Just as in the greater community the students' experiences at school are a function not only of their Blackness but of each element of their social identities. It is for this reason that the educational experiences of Black male students from Rexdale are far from homogeneous. In acknowledgement of this reality the educational experiences of Somali-Canadians are given the same type of special attention in this section as they were afforded in the last chapter. While certainly distinct from the experiences of other Black students it is difficult to say whether the prejudice that the students of Somali descent described experiencing in school was more attributable to their ethnicity or their religion. The distinction is not of critical importance, however comparing their experiences to those of practicing Muslim students of different ethnic backgrounds could provide a more precise indication as to the reason(s) for the unique ways in which they are oppressed educationally. In the following excerpt Mahad describes how teachers' expectations for Somali-Canadian male students are especially low.

**Mahad:** Even the teachers when they see a Somali boy walking to class they're already expecting the lowest from [him] and when they see you speak they're— sometimes they get shocked. They say: "oh I didn't know that was you." Like why would you perceive that I'm not up to standards?

Yet, besides knowing that teachers assume he is not academically capable because he is Somali-Canadian, Mahad also recounted stories which clearly illustrated prejudice against the Islamic faith practiced by Somali-Canadian students. The following excerpt is particularly disconcerting as it confirms the pervasiveness of Anti-Islamic discourse among educators. More specifically, it shows that administrators can be just as discriminatory as teachers when it comes to Anti-Islamic thoughts and behaviours.

**Mahad:** Actually every day I think I had a problem with a teacher.

Grade 10 it was my English teacher and it wasn't more Somalis, she just like – it was about like if I wanted to go and pray, she wouldn't let me pray. Or she would always bring up Islam and all that stuff in class and...

**Dan:** White?

**Mahad:** Ya, White and she would – you can see she has these stereotypes about Islam, you know? Typical stereotypes about how if a person is a practicing Muslim he wants to stay away from all disbelievers and kill all the disbelievers. So she had that type of ideology. So one day I try to give a speech on – we had a speech contest and I was told to give a speech – everybody was supposed to give a speech, it was an assignment and you could choose whatever you wanted. So I decided to do mine on Sharia Law, cause I knew this teacher you know, she had a misunderstanding about Islam so I tried to clear that up. At the end of the speech everybody's clapping, everybody's clapping, telling me I did a great job and she just looked at me like this and said: "oh, the – I didn't understand

anything from it, you know, all of these, these facts..." – she's telling ME the facts that I bring were wrong! Ya and in grade 11, grade 12...

**Dan:** So would you guys say that a lack of appreciation for religion was a problem in school?

**Sohaib:** Oh definitely.

**Gullede:** Definitely, ya.

**Mahad:** You can't even – if you're telling the teacher you're going for a bathroom break, you're gone for 15 minutes she won't say anything to you when you come back but, if you tell the teacher you're going to pray and you're only gone for 5 minutes, she'll snap on you. Or Fridays you know we have lunchtime prayer if you are one minute late she's gonna go to the office and say "look these guys are doing their Friday prayers, their ceremony or whatever it is, this religious stuff and they're coming late to my class. I don't want this to happen da da da." They like – it's a PROBLEM, it's a problem and if a vice principal sees you praying... One time a kid was praying under the stair case, it was during class time, I think he asked the teacher to go. The vice principal seen him, he's in the middle of prayer, he's screaming at him: "WHAT ARE YOU DOING OUTTA YOUR CLASS?! DA DA DA DA DA DA DA DA DA DA!!!" The kid just finished his prayer and then the guidance counselor came, he was chosen, he was one of the students chosen to go on a leadership trip. She said "leaders don't do this!" She took out his application, ripped it in his face.

In light of the multitude of negative experiences that Black participants discussed during this research, it is once again no wonder that Black students have a disproportionately high dropout rate (Dei et al., 1997). Furthermore, Xalimo argues that amongst Black male students, Somali male students have even higher drop-out rates. In fact, this issue was something Khadar was working with the TDSB to combat during the course of this research.

The consistent failure to provide Black male students with the education they deserve is not without consequence. In my interview with Jamal he stated what he believes to be just one of the effects of this educational inequity. Referring specifically to the high dropout rate among Somali male students in Ontario, Jamal indicated that it “correlates [with] the amount of kids and youth that we have in the court system right now.”

Dei et al. (1997) as well as James (2012a) suggest that Ontario’s schools generally serve to maintain the existing status quo. In considering this it is easy to understand why racism is still so prominent in Canadian education. The inertia of the racism that is experienced by so many Black students in a Canadian educational context, similar to the resilience of racism in other contexts, finds historical significance within Canadian CRT. As Henry and Tator (2009) write: “A significant body of evidence, however, demonstrates that educational institutions have preserved and perpetuated a system of structured inequality based on race” (p. 200). The scholars point out that during the 1850s in Canada many White people were strongly opposed to Black children going to the same schools as White children (2009). As such, segregated schools were long a part

of Ontario's legislature, surviving multiple legal challenges before finally being deemed illegal in 1964 (Henry & Tator, 2009).

### **Sport in Rexdale**

At its best sport can provide youth with opportunities to improve their health; work on life skills such as teamwork, dedication and responsibility; and increase the size of their social network. Yet, as this research revealed, sport, like education, is highly racialized and plagued by inequity. Quite simply, there are less sports available to racialized male youth from Rexdale meaning that they have fewer opportunities to reap the many benefits that come with participating in sport. Furthermore, as the participants explained, racialized male youth from Rexdale, and particularly Black male youth, face prejudice and discrimination when playing the few sports that are available to them. Therefore, contrary to common social discourse sport does not serve as a type of social panacea – at least for racialized male youth from the Rexdale community.

In listening to the participants share their experiences in sport it quickly became clear that their race was impactful. A couple of the participants described feeling as if they were the odd person out when taking part in team sports. For instance, Param explained how being Brown affected his interaction with the predominantly White players on his hockey team:

**Param:** Aah since I play hockey it's kind of awkward for me cause I'm Brown and you know most of the guys on my team are White so it's kinda like... it's different for me and like for them too because you know they don't think I'm that good.

John also suggested that his Blackness impacts the interactions he has with teammates. He explained that as a Black male youth he feels easily accepted when playing basketball but isolated when he plays hockey:

**John:** I find that in basketball it's easy for me to interact and join the team cause most people that play basketball are Black but, then when I play hockey it's more White people and... just because they think Black people don't play hockey they think we're not really good. It's challenging at times.

**Dan:** Ya and, if you don't mind me asking, how does it make it challenging?

**John:** Because it's like they put you in a group that if you don't – if you're not the type of skin tone or in that type of group, you're not really good at the sport. So we should just stay in the sport we should play. They'll judge you quickly before they even see you play. So sometimes we have to, like I try harder or I just really don't try to fit in. I just do my own thing.

**Dan:** Are there other non-White guys who play hockey as well on your team, or are you...

**John:** No, I'm the only Black guy on my team.

Having played hockey as a child Jamal empathized with the feelings of loneliness John felt as the only Black player on his team. James (2012a) would suggest that John and Jamal's experiences in hockey would be common amongst other Canadian Black males who have played the sport. He argues that Blacks are not thought to possess the attributes

necessary to succeed in hockey: ‘There is cultural significance to the sport, for if you are Black you are not perceived to have the aptitude, skills, and physicality for hockey, which is regarded as Canada’s “national” sport’ (James, 2012a, p. 478).

Yet, as John explained, hockey is not the only sport in which Black athletes are not fully accepted. He suggested that sports attracts specific racial groups:

**Dan:** Are there any umm barriers to you guys playing those sports? So, for those sports what’s your reason for not playing? Is it just that you don’t have the time or is it equipment or finding facilities or...

**John:** Well sometimes it could be like the type of group we have cause for each sport there’s usually the type of people that do the sport. So I find that like volleyball and baseball there’s more White people and for me to be coloured it would be hard at times even though we’re not racial, it’s just natural so, sometimes it’d be hard to be, ya.

Yet, race and/or ethnicity can be factors which not only discourage participation in a certain sport but also prevent a person from participating altogether. Mahad directly implicated race and racism as prevalent within sport. He suggested that leagues are sometimes demarcated along ethno-racial and geographical lines:

**Dan:** Does race or racism ever impact your sporting experiences?

**Mahad:** Sometimes. Maybe some leagues are more centered to certain types of people, you know? Like one time I tried to join this league but then you see it was a lot of Africans. Maybe there weren’t like – most of the guys didn’t like the area that I came from and most of the Somalis live in the area that I come from, you know? So the people who are running

[it], they just said fall back [chill out] even though it was open to everybody they just said relax.

Later on in the focus group the participants expanded on what Mahad said in the above excerpt. Together the three youth explained how Somali-Canadians from Dixon are excluded from a basketball league in Rexdale known as Y League:

**Mahad:** Y League's Dixon, they [the guys who run the league] won't let Dixon guys play.

**Gullede:** Ya cause there's gonna be a fight obviously.

**Sohaib:** Ya.

**Dan:** Dixon Road area?

**Gullede:** Ya Dixon Road, people from the community around there.

**Sohaib:** Ya. They don't let 'em play.

**Gullede:** They just assume there will be altercations and what-not.

**Dan:** They assume because there has been in the past?

**Gullede:** Ya there's been altercations. You know stupid kids, they don't like each other...

**Sohaib:** And they're Somali too, that's the funny thing.

**Mahad:** And they're Somali.

**Gullede:** Ya.

**Mahad:** The guys that say: "no, you're not playing." They're Somali guys.

**Sohaib:** I don't know how that makes sense.



Conversely, Gary stated that the SABL at the Rexdale Hub is just for Somali youth. This exclusion is directly related to the division of the community that was discussed in the section entitled 'The Community of Rexdale' from the previous chapter. As a result of community divisions that are in accordance with both neighbourhood boundaries as well as ethnic backgrounds opportunities to access sport within the community can be scarce.

Yet, ethno-racial discrimination and neighbourhood divisions were only a couple of the factors that the participants indicated as inhibiting the ability of Rexdale's racialized male youth to participate in sports. A couple of the South Asian participants described some of the other factors that seriously inhibit their ability to try the sports they have an interest in playing in the excerpt from the first focus group below:

**Dan:** Are there any sports that you don't play but wish that you could?

**Inder:** I think for me it'd be hockey. I can't skate but I want to play ice hockey because it just seems like a fun sport to play.

**Param:** I wish I could play lacrosse but I don't think there [are] opportunities here to play lacrosse cause, I don't know, it's a very rare sport and a tough sport to play I think.

Yet it was not only the South Asian participants who expressed a desire to try new sports. The Somali participants also showed an interest in trying sports other than basketball. For instance Sohaib expressed an interest in playing hockey while Mahad wanted to try fencing. They went on to explain why they cannot play those sports in the excerpt from the third focus group below:

**Dan:** And what – why don't you play hockey or in your case fencing?

**Sohaib:** Hockey is not available to me, like it's nowhere near where I live.

**Mahad:** You know fencing costs a lot of money so – too much.

**Dan:** ...What are some of the things that prevent you from playing sports that you wish you could?

**Gullede:** Equipment.

**Sohaib:** Ya equipment and recreational space.

**Mahad:** Money.

As a result of the reasons cited above Xalimo believes that, when it comes to sports, basketball is the only option for Black male youth from Rexdale:

**Xalimo:** So I feel like youth are forced to play basketball cause that's the only thing that is available in the inner city.

Jamal also suggested that Rexdale offers basketball hoops and little else in the way of public sports equipment. Furthermore, Xalimo went on to say that Black male youth from Rexdale face barriers even when trying to play basketball:

**Dan:** Are there any other kinds of barriers that you can think of to participating in maybe sports other than basketball or, basketball but in a more accessible way?

**Xalimo:** When it comes to playing sports I feel like the only sport that a lot of Black youth play is basketball in an inner city community. On top of that there are no avenues to play basketball at the high school or do something, you need a permit and it's really hard to get a permit. If you don't have access to a car or finances you're not gonna actually have a

facility to play at and on top of that you wouldn't want to play basketball late in the night because the lights get shut off so you can't even see. So the only time you can really play is during the day and ya, that's about it.

In the above excerpt from our interview, Xalimo described the inaccessibility of some of Rexdale's recreational facilities. Yet, as Gary explained the problem of accessibility begins with the fact that there are simply not enough recreational facilities in the Rexdale community:

**Gary:** There's Elmbank Community Centre like, there's one community centre here that's in Rexdale but it's a very small community centre. The gym is not nearly a full-function gym that they can have a full-court game. It's just a half court.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the Rexdale Community Hub – one of the few recreational facilities in Rexdale besides the Elmbank C.C. – had security measures in place which made it less accessible than the average community centre. During the course of my research I only visited the Hub on weekdays and during daytime hours yet the front doors were always locked. Except for a couple times when someone happened to be entering or exiting as I arrived, I had to ring a doorbell and then explain to someone that I was there to see Jamal before I was allowed to enter. These rather extensive security measures made sense in light of Gary's assertion that the Community Hub is not safe for all of Rexdale's male youth. In summation, the Black male youth who are able to use the Rexdale Community Hub do so under a level of surveillance similar to that which they experience in the greater Rexdale community.

The dearth of recreational facilities in Rexdale and their limited accessibility mean that the community's male youth may be forced to travel outside of the community in order to play sports. Xalimo mentioned that some of Rexdale's male youth regularly travel to Hoop Dome<sup>9</sup> or the Hershey Centre<sup>10</sup> where the youth are each charged \$5 or \$10 dollars to play basketball inside a gymnasium. This demonstrates the desire that some of the youth have to play basketball while reinforcing the need for a greater number of accessible recreational facilities within Rexdale.

The last major inhibitor to participation in sports amongst Rexdale's racialized male youth as articulated by the participants was a shortage of organized sports leagues in the community. Xalimo said that of the few organized sports programs that are available in Rexdale the majority are not structured as leagues. She explained that these programs do not establish set teams and have neither coaches nor practices to help players develop skills and strategies. As the South Asian participants explained, the lack of organized sports leagues in Rexdale forces them to assume the responsibility of scheduling times to play sports with their friends and to search for opportunities to take part in organized sports elsewhere:

**Dan:** Do you ever come across any other types of barriers to playing sports?

**Inder:** For me it's basically like you have to organize it so if you're playing outside of school it's hard to play.

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<sup>9</sup> The Hoop Dome facility is a part of Downsview Park which is located near the intersection of Keele Street and Sheppard Avenue West.

<sup>10</sup> The Hershey Centre is located in Mississauga.

**Karamjeet:** For me it's like, I want to play a lot of sports but then most of my friends either they don't have the equipment or they don't want to play. So if most of the people are interested then it's easier to play...

**Param:** For me it's basically time because I do a lot of stuff and it's not that I don't like playing but finding the time to look for opportunities and look for coaches around here it's kind of hard and sometimes I get lazy. It's like if it's not nearby then there's no point of going but I guess I just need to put more effort into it.

Gary suggested that more organized sports leagues would benefit the Rexdale community greatly as they would provide its youth with an alternative to simply hanging out.

Yet, even if a racialized male youth from Rexdale is to find an organized sports league he still must be able to afford joining the league. As Xalimo explained there are a lack of affordable organized leagues meaning that Rexdale's male youth may be forced to play sports at the recreational level.

**Xalimo:** Ok what I notice in Rexdale, a lot of the Somali like, a lot of the Black youth generally are not part of an actual recreational facility other than SMBL. Majority of the people what they do is they just go to the local high school, middle school and play outside. That's where majority of the people get their physical activity. I don't think anybody in the inner city has the funds to actually join a league.

Jamal also felt that the organized leagues that are available to Rexdale's male youth are often too expensive for them to join. However, as Jamal explained, members

of the community will sometimes provide financial support for talented young athletes so that they may play in competitive leagues:

**Jamal:** Some of the kids I know play on club teams... With the program that I run on Saturdays with the older guys I know some of the kids are really, really good but they can't pay for their club team. I know some of the older guys, they've come to me and they told me that they would donate 20, 30, 40 bucks and then collectively give it to him so he can go and play. I think that's important for our community to start doing where we start recognizing kids that are excelling in anything.

The fact that members of the community are willing to support the development of Rexdale's exceptional athletes is definitely admirable. Still, it is sad to consider that the vast majority of Rexdale's youth are unlikely to pursue their athletic endeavours because of the many barriers that prevent them from accessing organized sport.

Although much can be done to increase the number of sports available to Rexdale's male youth it is important to acknowledge the sports that are already available within the community. When asked what sports are available for them to play the South Asian participants gave the following answers:

**Inder:** K so basically out of schools it's like hockey, basketball, soccer, football, track and field, cross-country...

**Karamjeet:** There are some sports you could play outside of school, there's like all these leagues for baseball, hockey and basically everything.

**Param:** So there is snowboarding, there is skiing, I've also seen curling but it's kind of boring. There's figure skating, there's skating, there's hockey, there's a lot of sports in Toronto.

Karamjeet and Param's responses indicate that there are opportunities to play sports in Rexdale or, at very least, in other parts of Toronto. At any rate, the existence of these opportunities represents a positive foundation from which further development can be made. The objective now must be to make the existing opportunities accessible to all of Rexdale's youth and to increase the total number of sports available.

Yet, as Inder indicated, schools already offer a wide selection of sports for their students to play. More importantly, school sports are both affordable and organized. So, while it is critical that more organized sports be offered to youth within the Rexdale community it is integral that the organized sports already offered at schools become accessible to all students.

However, it is important to re-establish the fact that the educational experiences of Black male students are distinct from those of their non-Black male peers. All too often school is a source of alienation and trauma for Black male youth. So, because schools serve as a main source of affordable organized sport in Rexdale, the community's Black male students are faced with a predicament. The predicament is: endure the overwhelmingly negative experience of education in order to access organized sport or, leave school as a way of removing oneself from an oppressive situation but at the expense of one's ability to participate in organized sport. Yet, if we can improve the education that Rexdale's Black male youth receive, it will not only give them a better chance of

achieving upward social mobility, it will also allow them more opportunities to access organized sports.

The youth workers interviewed in this study stressed that sport can be used to enhance other aspects of the lives of Rexdale's Black male youth. Gary described sport as a tool that can be used to engage the male youth from the community who may need his support.

**Dan:** Can you speak to maybe the importance of sport or, are the youth that you're working with involved in sport and in what ways?

**Gary:** With Breaking The Cycle [the anti-gang program] we don't necessarily have recreation but we will consider sports to be a recreation component to the program in terms of any added sports that we do on a regular basis. Being in the community, being a youth worker and actually working with youths as a frontline worker I do understand the importance of engagement. Recreation is a tool that's used to engage youths, just to get youths in the door.

Jamal also described using sport to build connections with male youth from Rexdale.

**Jamal:** I said you know let me say – anything I can do to help and sports for me is that bridge, the common thing that everyone... every young male does. Whether it be basketball, football, soccer, hockey – whatever it be.

Majority of them do like sports.

Building relationships with Rexdale's racialized male youth through sport can give community leaders like Gary and Jamal opportunities to help the youth deal with



problems they may be experiencing, such as police maltreatment and educational inequity.

Although organized sports are important within the Rexdale community because they provide its male youth opportunities to access community supports, sports also provide opportunities to interact with male youth from outside the community, and it is this interaction that makes organized sports so imperative. This social opportunity is especially important for some of Rexdale's Black male youth who could be harmed when they travel to certain neighbourhoods within the community. Increasing the number of opportunities for Rexdale's Black male youth to participate in organized sports can help address this issue, as most organized sports require players to travel to other communities, cities, provinces or even countries. Gary stresses the need for organized sports in the Rexdale community in the excerpt from our interview below:

**Dan:** Is there anything else that you'd like to say about the meanings that sport plays in the lives of youth or could play in the lives of youth?

**Gary:** I mean we understand that if a person doesn't have anything to do they choose the wrong things and it's very important that we do involve sports and recreation into the communities. Especially a lot of these communities that are considered to be, you know, high risk neighbourhoods, right? A lot of these youths, they need other alternatives just then hanging out on the corner, just hanging out with their friends in the community because their communities are becoming unsafe. So I mean they need other things to do to keep them busy and to keep them being able to socialize with other groups and get outside the community.

These other programs are needed because that will get them to experience other ways of life and to be exposed to different people, right? I think that's extremely important but again ya, I just say we need more independent programs in terms of football leagues, basketball leagues that are solely geared to only the Rexdale community, that the youths are coming from the Rexdale community, that will be placed in leagues that will play against other communities like Hamilton or Niagara Falls or... I mean if you're taking them to Vaughan or you're taking them to Kitchener or you're taking them to Oakville, you know what I mean? Getting them outside of the traditional Toronto, the core of Toronto and get them outside to different places, that's what I'm talking about.

Still, discussing the social benefits of sport and advocating for equitable access to sport for Rexdale's racialized male youth would be less relevant if the youth were not really interested in playing a variety of sports. However, the youth that I interviewed expressed a great desire to try a range of sports.

The fact that these youth do not have access to Canada's national sports reinforces not only the athletic inequities that they encounter as male youth from Rexdale but also part of the difficulty they experience in their attempts to claim Canadian identity. Yet, amongst all the answers that the participants provided in regards to trying different sports Mahad's response stood out. Having articulated his desire to try fencing, Mahad went on to describe the importance that sport holds in his life:

**Mahad:** For me I don't know about basketball but I might try and broaden my horizons, you know look at different sports, sports that I never

played before. Maybe look at tennis or something like that, you know? Just instead of staying with basketball – basketball I’ve been playing for 18 years of my life... For me sports relieves my stress – whether it be from school, from my area, from the problems police give me – it just, it’s a way for me to relieve my stress. So I definitely would want to play sports, regardless of what it is in the future, and I plan to stick with it, you know? It’s a big part of my life.

The factors that participants identified as shaping racialized male youth’s experiences in sport within the Rexdale community are reflected by those which Henry and Tator identified as factors that shape all individuals’ experiences in sport. They suggest “that participation in sports is still heavily dependent on social, cultural, and financial resources” (Henry & Tator, 2009, p. 304). Like sport, Canadian society is stricken by the perpetuation of discrimination and inequity. The power of this cycle is encapsulated by Dei et al. (1997) in the following quote: “society reproduces the social conditions which allow for the perpetuation of racism, sexism, poverty, hunger, and material deprivation” (p. 195). Though sport is marred by its own problems, it is important to recognize sport’s role in addressing these causes of social inequity because, as Gary and Jamal explained, sport is about far more than having fun; winning and losing; or even being physically healthy for Rexdale’s racialized male youth.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

This thesis provides an account of the experiences of Rexdale's racialized male youth within their community and beyond. Among other functions, it places a spotlight on the plight of a group of individuals who are stigmatized, stereotyped and subjugated within Canadian society. In the same way that this thesis uses school and sport as a window through which the lives of racialized male youth are examined, this thesis also explores historical and contemporary social inequities beyond the classroom or sporting arena.

While this thesis outlines the impact of racial oppression in the lives of male youth in Rexdale, it also identifies the commitment of several people working towards the elimination of that racial oppression. Similarly, in their research on the experiences of Aboriginal students and staff in four Manitoba schools, van Ingen and Halas (2006) recognized the ongoing work undertaken by people within the community. They wrote: "we acknowledge that some of the issues we identify are currently being addressed by educators working daily to understand and improve the educational outcomes for Aboriginal students within their schools" (van Ingen and Halas, 2006, p. 382). It quickly became evident in my own research that there are many resilient and committed social workers in Rexdale working alongside residents to overcome the systemic inequities that have such a profound effect on their lives. It is with an appreciation of these continual efforts to affect positive change in the community that this chapter revisits the three research questions that guided this project.

1. How do racialized male youth from Rexdale experience their community?

Rexdale is a marginalized space within the city of Toronto and the youth research participants experience it as such. Yet, Rexdale's racialized male youth experience their community in different ways depending on their individual social identities. Quite simply, as this research has made clear, Brown male youth experience life in Rexdale in a very different way than the community's Black male youth. Although they identified certain parts of Rexdale as "bad", the South Asian participants did not express any personal threats to their safety in regards to navigating spaces within the community or beyond its borders. Conversely, as Gary explained, some of the community's space is inaccessible to its Black male youth because it is unsafe for them to enter certain neighbourhoods. Yet, as Jamal explained, just as some of Rexdale's Black male youth may be endangered travelling within their own community they may experience similar danger travelling beyond Rexdale's borders and into some of Toronto's other communities:

**Dan:** Within an athletic context or just greater context, for a Somali male youth in Rexdale, are they experiencing things that the other Black male youth from Rexdale aren't experiencing or are not welcome...

**Jamal:** You know when I went to go and play, like a group of basketball players would go – but I wouldn't say it's just Somali cause I know like my best friend growing up was Jamaican and me and him would go, some places we'd go we gotta make sure our stuff is right beside us or somewhere where we could accessibly get it and head for the door if anything happens and that's just because of where we were from. So kids

from Rexdale going to play somewhere in Malvern he better understand that there's gonna be situations out there – cause he doesn't know, unless he comes with somebody from the neighbourhood and that's more of a turf thing. I think that's in every megacity, like Toronto.

Xalimo added to that notion by reiterating the relevance of social identity. She argued that Black males from Rexdale experienced other Toronto communities in a unique way. She suggested that shootings are most likely to occur when a Black male youth from one community enters another community in Toronto (i.e., a male youth from Rexdale travelling to Jane and Finch). Gary highlighted the reality of the danger that Xalimo alluded to when he said that Randy, a gang-associated Black male from Rexdale (and a participant in the GED exam preparation course that I helped to facilitate), would not be able to attend York University because of its proximity to Jane and Finch. The seriousness of this statement is supported by the fact that Randy and his friend were shot while in the Falstaff<sup>11</sup> neighbourhood. Sadly, Randy's friend succumbed to his gunshot wounds.

Needless to say community demarcations have serious implications for Rexdale's Black male youth. Furthermore, inter-neighbourhood tension is another reality that affects the lives of Rexdale's Black male youth. Therefore, Rexdale's Black male youth are more likely to be confined to a smaller area of their own community than the community's male youth from other racial groups. It is within this restricted space that they experience inordinate amounts of racism and police maltreatment.

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<sup>11</sup> Falstaff Avenue is located just south of Highway 401. It runs from Jane Street to Keele Street.

2. What is the role of school in the lives of racialized youth from Rexdale?

Male youth in this study from Rexdale's South Asian community are expected to be smart and to do well in school. Yet the fulfillment of their academic expectations can come at the expense of their ability to participate in activities, such as sports. Conversely, Rexdale's Black male youth must resist and overcome racism in order to achieve academically. For instance, in describing how he responds to Somali students who tell him that their teacher does not like them because they are Black and/or Somali, Jamal said this:

**Jamal:** Sometimes it might be the case. It might be all the time, I don't know BUT, I try to say that I believe that in the majority of cases you're in control of what you do and that's the message that I try to relay to them. Cause if I tell them "ya, it's racism and you'll never go nowhere" then they'll be like "who cares?"

This quote exhibits the educational resistance that Jamal inspires in the Somali youth he works with. Not surprisingly the Somali youth I interviewed from the SMBL each articulated aspirations of higher education despite describing oppressive educational conditions.

Jamal went on to describe how a co-worker of his who had a particularly negative teacher – the same teacher who thought Jamal was not capable of succeeding in Calculus – would return to their high school each semester to show the teacher and his students his marks from university. The teacher had told Jamal's co-worker that he would not make it past his first year of university. Jamal encourages his sisters and other graduates of the

school to do the same. He wants them to show current students that if you work hard in school you can overcome the low expectations of teachers and achieve success.

Yet, in addition to the perseverance they show in education Rexdale's Black male youth displayed similar resistance in other contexts. As John demonstrates in the proceeding excerpt, Black male youth may also prove resistant in their professional aspirations:

**John:** My goals are to own my own business and have like a perfect, established place that people will look up to no matter what I'm wearing, what's my background or like, they just judge me on what I present to the table... I also [want to] become successful so I can have people recommend me and go far to places around the world; travel.

The aspirational capital exhibited by Rexdale's Black male youth represents a significant contribution to the overall cultural wealth of their community (Yosso, 2005). Furthermore, as Howarth (2002) suggested, the ability to resist is not innate. It takes more than the strength of an individual's will. She wrote: "What is clear from the research is that some young people simply do not have the representational tools or social capital to acknowledge stigma, let alone develop oppositional representations" (p. 251).

Consequently, this highlights the fact that there are individuals in Rexdale who "have the representational tools or social capital" necessary to help the community's youth understand the ways in which they are stereotyped and stigmatized. These individuals support the youth in their resistance against those representations. Jamal, Gary and Xalimo are, I am certain, just a few examples of these types of people. Howarth went on to describe the extreme and opposite results of resistance as either



“dehumanising or inspiring” (p. 255). Appreciating these stakes makes the resistance exhibited by the Black male youth of Rexdale all the more impressive.

3. In what ways do race, class and gender intersect to shape the sporting experiences of male youth from Rexdale?

Messner (as cited in Carrington, 1998, p. 279-280) indicated that “subordinated groups of men” have used sport as means of resisting “racist, colonial, and class domination.”

While there are plenty of cases throughout history that can be referred to in support of this statement, subordinated groups must first be given the opportunity to play a sport before they can use that sport as a tool of resistance. As both the literature and the participants have indicated race, class, and gender intersect to shape the sporting experiences of racialized male youth in distinct ways, often placing them at a disadvantage. In particular, male youth from Rexdale live within a community that is racially segregated and economically underprivileged.

Overall, it was assumed that South Asian male youth would not play sports and that if they did they would be unskilled. The South Asian youth that I interviewed saw sport as something valuable that could be used to help them get their minds off of academics. It was a valued reprieve from the demands of school.

Overall, the inaccessibility of sport to Rexdale’s racialized male youth is ironically juxtaposed by an entrenched stereotype that characterizes Blacks as naturally athletic (James, 2005). As a result, within sporting cultures there are some situations in which Black male youth are at least supported, if not privileged. For example, Xalimo explained that academic standards are lowered for Black students-athletes so that they can be permitted to continue to participate in school athletics. While this form of

“consideration” does constitute privilege within sporting cultures, it is very apparent that it comes at the expense of oppression within other, arguably more important, facets of life such as academics. Consequently, when we consider that Blackness is read to mean proficiency in basketball and/or innate proclivity in some other sports it should not be forgotten that it carries meaning(s) in other domains that are decidedly more negative.

Towards the end of our interview Jamal encapsulated the way in which the social identities of Rexdale’s racialized male youth impact their experiences in sport. When asked whether there was anything else he’d “like to add about the meanings that sport has in the lives of male youth from Rexdale” Jamal responded by saying:

I would think sport is the same to all male youth but yes, it does mean a little bit more to kids from Rexdale, or kids from Jane and Finch, or kids from Malvern. Because for some guys that’s the only place where they can just be them. They don’t have to put on a different persona or, you know, have to fit a specific type of person. You playing basketball, you playing basketball. That’s all it is. It’s the ball and the defender and the hoop and it’s something that I guess, [for] some of the guys, it’s strongly needed because everywhere else they go they’re expected to do something. Whether it be from their parents, whether it be from their boys, whether it be from their community, whether it be from – wherever it be, the police, doesn’t matter. But when it comes to sport you just expected to be a good defender or a good goalie, whatever the sport is. That’s all you’re expected to be and you can do that... So I would say it’s the same as any other – as important as it is for any other youth living outside of Rexdale.

It's as important but just a little bit more and that's just because of the environment that they live in.

The intersection of race, class and gender impacts the experiences that Rexdale's racialized male youth have in sport in a way that is consistent with the effect those variables have on individuals' experiences within society as a whole. While Toronto's White male youth generally experience social privilege and an abundance of opportunities to access a variety of organized sports, Rexdale's Brown male youth face some social oppression and are affected by inequity when it comes to organized sport. It is important that these youth be provided with more opportunities to access organized sports.

However, Rexdale's Black male youth must overcome an extreme brand of social oppression and have little access to organized sports. As a result of the distinctive way in which they experience society, sports, as Jamal suggests, carry a heightened significance for Rexdale's Black male youth. For these youth it is absolutely critical that their desires to access organized sports in their community be met with opportunities.

#### *Future directions*

In reflecting on this entire research process I am very cognizant of how different this research could have been had this investigation been conducted differently. Another methodology would have generated different data or, another principal investigator might have connected with the research participants differently. For example, a researcher from the Rexdale community may have made the participants who informed the research more at ease and thus more forthcoming with their counterstories. Furthermore, if I had the time and opportunity to develop deeper connections within the community, it is possible

that I eventually could have spoken with people who I was not able to connect with in the relatively short amount of time I had to produce this research. I am hopeful that individuals who conduct research in Rexdale in the future are able to learn from these reflections.

As this research revealed, racial inequity is deeply embedded in Canadian culture. A big step towards solving this enormous issue will be identifying and subsequently deconstructing the nuanced methods of stereotyping and stigmatization that work to subjugate Black Canadians. At the same time the corresponding privileges afforded to Whiteness in Canada must also be identified and deconstructed.

However, discourses do not stand in isolation. They interact with each other so as to impact individuals in different ways based on the intersection of their social identities. As such, racial discourses are not the only ones that require serious revisions. Discourses such as those centred on socio-economic status and gender also require major revisions, among a litany of others.

Sport is one site for the contestation of such discourses. While sport is in some ways a microcosm of society and does not serve as a panacea for its problems, it is definitely a site that can be used to help usher in new social discourses predicated on appreciation, opportunity and equity. Marqusee (as cited in Carrington, 1998) wrote: "On sport's level playing field, it is possible to challenge and overturn the dominant hierarchies of nation, race, and class. The reversal may be limited and transient, but it is nonetheless real" (p. 275). If sport can serve as one of a number of sites of resistance to the hegemonic discourses that support prejudice and inequity in Canada then the process of change can be expedited.

Yet this type of drastic change requires more than an ideal and a venue, it requires people with resilience and strength of character; people who are capable of overcoming deep-rooted viewpoints and steadfast tradition. During the course of this research I recognized those characteristics in the great people I met from Rexdale. It is those very characteristics along with the energy and confidence exhibited by someone like Jamal which gave me reason to believe that the changing of discourses is possible. In discussing Rexdale and its youth Jamal said:

Whether it be sport, whether it be academic, make sure that if it's the dollar sign that's keeping them from going to that next step, eliminate that. As a community, even if they can't do it as a family, as a community I know for sure we should be able to do it.

The future is bright for Rexdale and those call it home. I hope that this research contributes to the positive change that members of the community have long been fighting for. I am especially hopeful that readers will have gained critical insights from this thesis and that they will be encouraged to support organized sport in Rexdale by volunteering their time and/or providing their financial resources.

As a teacher, this research inquiry has left a lasting impact on me. Not only has it changed the ways in which I approach the classroom and school sport, it has altered the way in which I view education as a whole. Moving forward I would like to see critical race theory begin to play a more prominent role within Ontario's education system so that together we may offer equitable education as part of a more equitable society. To borrow the words of Jamal "I know for sure we should be able to do it."

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## Appendix A

### Interview Guide for Semi-Structured Focus-Group Interviews

*Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. My research focuses on the meanings that sport have in the lives of male youth from the Rexdale community. You may choose to skip questions or withdraw from the focus group at any time. Please do not pressure your peers to participate. A sound recorder will be used to record the interview. Do you have any questions before we begin?*

\*Have each participant state their name and age.

1. What sports are available for you to play here in Rexdale (generate list)?
2. More specifically – what sports do you play and where?
3. Why do you play that sport(s)?
4. Are there any sports you don't play but wish you could (do you have the opportunity to play hockey...)?
5. Does race or racism ever impact your sport experiences?

Can you give me examples?

6. Are there any other barriers to playing sport (i.e., money, equipment, facilities, coaches, etc.)?
7. Have you experienced racism outside of sport?

Can you give me examples?

8. As a person from Rexdale, do you ever feel stereotyped?
9. I am from Toronto as well and it seems to me that there are a lot more police driving around Rexdale than in other parts of Toronto... Do you feel as if you are being watched by the police?

\*Another question here based on the responses..

10. I am going to be a teacher and would love to work and coach sports here in Rexdale. If I were to get a job at a school here what information would you want me to know that would make me a better teacher or coach?
11. Do you think you will continue to play sports as you get older?
12. What goals do you want to achieve in the future?
13. Is there anything else you would like to say about the meaning that sport has in your lives?

*I don't have any more questions. Do you have anything else you'd like to add? Ok thank you.*

## Appendix B

### Interview Guide for Semi-Structured Individual Interviews – Leaders from the Community

*Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. My research focuses on the meanings that sport have in the lives of male youth from the Rexdale community. You may choose to skip questions or withdraw from the interview at any time. A sound recorder will be used to record the interview. Do you have any questions before we begin?*

1. Can you explain your involvement with male youth from the Rexdale community?
2. What sports are available for male youth to play here in Rexdale (generate list)?
3. Where do the male youth you work with play sports?
4. To your knowledge do the male youth experience any barriers to playing sport (i.e., money, equipment, facilities, coaches, etc.)?
5. What significance do race and racism have within the Rexdale community?  
Can you give me examples?
6. Do you feel that male youth from Rexdale are stereotyped in any particular ways?
7. I am from Toronto as well and it seems to me that there are a lot more police driving around Rexdale than in other parts of Toronto... Can you describe the effect that police surveillance has on the community and the youth you work with?  
\*Another question here based on the responses..
8. I recently had an interview with the Toronto District School Board and would love to teach and coach sports here in Rexdale. If I were to get a job at a school here what information would you want me to know that would make me a better teacher or coach?



9. What are some of the goals that male youth from Rexdale express a desire to achieve in the future?
10. Is there anything else you would like to say about the meaning that sport has in the lives of male youth from Rexdale?

*I don't have any more questions. Do you have anything else you'd like to add? Ok thank you.*